STUDENT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF PRONUNCIATION TASKS IN ANDALUSIA

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1 ABSTRACT

Within the development of the key competence of oral communication and spoken interaction in a foreign language, correct and intelligible pronunciation is a key concern. It is perhaps the case, however, that the time spent on enabling students to enhance this aspect of their communicative capacity has been given less systematic treatment than in other activities in the foreign language classroom.

This paper discusses a number of key questions involved in the acquisition of accurate pronunciation in formal instructional settings and reports on the perceived effectiveness of activities aimed directly or indirectly at developing pronunciation.

The study involves the retrospective assessment by 189 student teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Andalusia, to identify which classroom activities helped most to increase their pronunciation attainment and to examine why students in this context often fail to improve in this area.

Key words: pronunciation, phonological control, Primary Education, Secondary Education

2 INTRODUCTION

In relation to the development of competence in foreign languages, the debate in favour of unconscious acquisition as opposed to conscious learning is perhaps most relevant and heated in the area of pronunciation. Certainly, this aspect of communicative competence is readily noticeable in any oral interchange involving native and non-native speakers and many would tend to agree with Setter and Jenkins' (2005: 13) statement that pronunciation is the most important element in successful spoken communication. Internationally and within the specific context of Spain, pronunciation teaching has had a history of neglect and, indeed, there have been uncertainties with regards to

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which instructional procedures, if any, should be involved (Barrera, 2004; Jones, 1997; Hismanoglu, 2006; Morley, 1991; Walker, 1999).

While Barrera's (2004) review of the literature shows that the weight of pronunciation in receptive and productive performance has been fairly well established, the time and efforts invested in developing pronunciation proficiency in the classroom are not always consistent with its importance. In Spain, for example, in the case of the major-selling textbooks authorized for language teaching in schools, the development of pronunciation generally occupies substantially less coverage than other areas. This is not dissimilar to the state of affairs reported for the 1960s-1980s in Morley's (1991) review of the recent history of pronunciation teaching, which describes the significant reduction or virtual disappearance of pronunciation components in language programmes as a result of the focus on communicative competence and increased concerns for task-based, authentic and meaningful learning. At the same time, authors such as Jones (1997) argue that despite a renewed interest into the incorporation of pronunciation in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the reality is often one whereby commercially available textbooks essentially imitate procedures from audiolingual methods used in the 1950s, including drilling and decontextualised pronunciation activities.

The treatment of pronunciation, then, if instruction is not to depend on the limited resources provided by course books, rests very much with the teachers themselves and on their own personal attitudes towards this component. However, as Walker (1999) reports for the context in question, despite an overwhelming consensus on the part of teachers as the importance of pronunciation, there is both a general lack of planning for pronunciation activities and a large divergence of practices between teachers, ranging from those who claim to regularly introduce pronunciation activities in class and those who do such work on a sporadic or improvised basis. It is not surprising, therefore, to read accounts of the unsatisfactory levels of students' pronunciation performance in this context (see Bartolí, 2005).

In this paper, then, we wish to examine two key questions in relation to pronunciation teaching in the foreign language class in Andalusia:

1. How important is the role of instruction in students' attainment of pronunciation?
2. Which procedures or settings favour enhanced pronunciation in formal FL instruction?

In order to begin to answer the question of the significance of instruction and to determine which procedures may improve student performance, we examine evidence from empirical studies and authoritative state-of-the-art publications, focusing primarily on the impact of activities which may

enhance productive, rather than receptive oral performance. Our study also describes results from a survey on perceptions of student teachers of Primary and Secondary level language education, which asks about the effectiveness of activities commonly employed in order to improve student pronunciation as well as a more probing question into the reasons behind the failure of students to master this area of communicative competence. It is likely that the results and discussion presented here may be most relevant to those working or preparing to work as teachers in this context; nevertheless, it is also possible that certain aspects may also prove useful to professionals working with similar learning environments.

2. THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTION IN PRONUNCIATION

2.1 Guidelines and external resources

The *Common European Framework* (CoE, 2001) invites teachers and learners to reflect upon the most important aspects of language teaching and learning and includes a series of considerations in relation to pronunciation and phonological control. This document has been taken as a reference guide for educational administrations throughout Europe, however, given its non-prescriptive nature, rather than providing empirical data to suggest the relative strengths and weaknesses of certain approaches, it provides descriptions of alternatives, ultimately leaving the final decisions to those responsible for teaching and learning.

In terms of pronunciation, users are essentially presented with the following reflection: should we use bottom-up, explicit and conscious processes to directly teach phonological control, or is it preferable to employ a top-down process which allows students to gradually acquire correct pronunciation through varied sources of comprehensible input, or, alternatively, should a mixture of both be employed (see CoE, 2001: 153)? While there may be many merits to describing alternative procedures to those involved in language learning and inviting them to reflect on possible courses of action in the classroom, teachers are still left very much in the dark as to which approach best suits them. Of course, given the broad coverage of Framework in terms of language learning settings, this road would seem to be the natural one to take, and in order to see which methodological paths are most appropriate it would be necessary to know the many contextual variables, including student age, the academic context (e.g. bilingual training or standard FL classes) as well as the L2 under study and the L1 of the student. This goes well beyond the objectives of the Framework and, as previously mentioned, leaves the responsibility for determining pronunciation

methodology in the hands of others, among whom we could include educational administrations, materials writers and teaching professionals.

In the case of modern foreign language teaching in Spain and Andalusia, recent changes in educational legislation for primary and secondary education at national (MEC, 2006) and regional levels (Consejería, 2007) have integrated principles contained within the Framework. However, despite providing methodological guidelines for other aspects of CLT, they do not in any way consider how phonological control should be managed in the classroom. If we examine textbooks published in the wake of these legislative changes, it is possible to see that the focus on pronunciation, save a few exceptions, also leave most of the decision-making to teachers. A cursory glance at some of these textbooks reveals that many contain little more than a single brief exercise employing rote-repetition per unit (these textbooks are often divided into eight to ten units per academic year), accompanied more than occasionally with phonetic symbols which students neither understand nor, less they become linguists, will likely ever use. Admittedly, textbooks are beginning to take this aspect more seriously than before, however, in many cases, little is done to systematically encourage active participation in terms of cognitive or affective involvement.

The combined influence of legislation or government guidelines, the contents of authorised textbooks and recent descriptions of the state of affairs in teaching and learning of pronunciation in Spain (see Walker, 1999; Bartolí, 2005) appears to indicate the need for a heightened awareness of the problems and potentials surrounding the development of phonological control. Perhaps the first question that should be asked, then, is whether this aspect of communicative competence should, given its often insufficient coverage, even be incorporated into the scenario of formal instruction.

2.2 Acquired phonological control

As language professionals, we are undoubtedly familiar with the major arguments which have developed over the last 40 years in terms of unconscious acquisition and conscious learning of the language. Krashen's (1981; 1985) Theory on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) argued that natural communication involves the conveying and understanding of messages, competence occurs through exposure to comprehensible input and that a focus on form through explicit teaching has little to offer in terms of enhancing communicative competence. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis further moved away from views that advocated conscious language learning; this has had important effects in terms of the promotion of language acquisition rather than planned learning in the language class, the need to create affective environments to favour such acquisition, as well as the use of

tasks and incidental learning. In terms of pronunciation, this view appears to be supported by Purcell and Suter's (1980) study of twenty variables affecting pronunciation in English as a Second Language (ESL), which lead them to conclude that there was little correlation between the teaching of pronunciation conducted in classrooms and the level of competence attained by students.

From this period we see a divergence in language teaching approaches: CLT, which is planned and deliberate, and pedagogies like the natural approach, where learning is not considered to be linear, nor is it so much intentional as incidental (Kumaravadivelu, 2005: 92). The contrast in natural and CLT approaches has resulted in controversy and a major number of criticisms have been labelled against Krashan's work. One suggestion was that little attention was paid to oral production and that there was a need for comprehensible output (Swain, 1985). It has also been argued that not all learning is subconscious and that language development may take place through conscious learning, among other reasons, in order to promote noticing (Schmidt, 1990; Yule, 1986). Furthermore, McLaughlin (1987: 56) saw empirical weaknesses and a lack of precision in Krashen's hypotheses, whereas White (1987) believed that Krashen failed to show how the input hypothesis worked, and saw contradictions in an approach which, while discouraging the teacher manipulation of input, advocated simplifying language in order to make input more readily understandable. Finally, Brumfit (1992), in a review of Krashen (1989) cautioned against adopting what he viewed as an *en vogue*, yet partial, and oversimplified theory for language learning.

Nevertheless, although the theories postulated by Krashen have been criticised by both SLA and FL researchers, much of the theory and practical considerations behind Krashen's approach have been adopted as the grounding for developing ways to conduct language learning. Furthermore, it is possible to find direct references to a number of these principles in contemporary programmes associated with the establishment of standards of teacher quality (see TESOL, 2002: 26-27).

2.3 Management of phonological control in formal settings

Despite the impact of natural language theory on classroom approaches, a large number of language professionals point to the usefulness of conscious student involvement in the development of phonological control. Pennington (1989) questions the validity of Purcell and Suter's (1980) findings and argues for the usefulness of conscious development of pronunciation within a communicative framework. Working in adult ESL, Morley (1991) also finds certain advantages in helping learners to consciously develop their pronunciation and indicates a series of strategies and scenarios which may

facilitate progress. Among the areas suggested, Morley argues for explicit teacher directions and guidelines, greater levels of student involvement (including intellectual involvement, self-monitoring, self-modification skills and recognition of self-responsibility and accomplishment), and the establishment of a supportive teacher-student, student-student classroom atmosphere.

Several authors (Leather, 1983; Morley, 1991; Pennington, 1996; Setter & Jenkins; 2005) argue for the inclusion of pronunciation as a more integrated part of pedagogical activities, not only in terms of exposure to the target language, but also through direct training. Chela-Flores (2001) encourages the incorporation of an integral teaching framework that includes pronunciation learning units, which, she suggests, overcomes the limitations of spending time on pronunciation in class and raises awareness of the links that exist between pronunciation teaching and productive and receptive oral communication.

Other authors, however, while advocating certain elements of explicit teaching of pronunciation, also point to the lack of empirical evidence on the usefulness of pronunciation teaching (see Stern, 1992). On the other hand, Jones (1997) points to the fact that empirical studies which argue against explicit instruction, such as Purcell and Suter (1980), have tended to arise from ESL environments and do not fully take into account the possibilities offered in terms of teacher influence in motivation and exposure within the classroom.

In terms of actual evidence to support the inclusion of a pronunciation teaching component in language programmes, the situation does seem to have changed somewhat in the last ten or fifteen years. Elliot (1995) provides evidence to link accurate pronunciation with attitude and instruction in a study of students of Spanish. Later, in Elliot (1997), an experimental group of intermediate Spanish students who received phonetic training outperformed a control group which had received none. In the context of primary education in Southern Spain, Quijada (1998) conducted an experimental study with upper primary school students (10 to12 year-olds) and found that those who had undergone explicit phonological training through a variety of activities surpassed the control group, who were provided with no explicit training. In this case, the experimental group obtained higher scores in oral receptive and productive tests. Mennim (2003) also found certain improvements in pronunciation performance after previously focusing on students difficulties in rehearsals for oral output. More recently, in Neri, Mich, Gerosa and Giuliani (2008), Italian students of English who partook in computer-assisted pronunciation training obtained short-term improvement over those who did not participate in the treatment. While these studies show improvements in FL contexts, similar conclusions may also be found in more recent studies

conducted in naturalistic SLA settings (see Bongaerts, Mennen & van der Slik, 2000: 306).

It would appear, then, that a conscious focus on pronunciation in formal instruction does tend to have benefits on student learning, however, there is also a perceived need to combine phonological practice with other factors. Training, for example, should not be limited to the isolated repetition of discrete sounds (segmentals), or indeed longer utterances which include tone, stress and prosody (suprasegmentals). Cohen (1977), for example, indicates that the teaching of phonemes though minimal pairs was insufficient in enabling students to gain in intelligilility and that suprasegmentals should also be practiced through communicative exercises. Morley (1991) defends the integration of oral pronunciation within the communicative curriculum and insisted upon the need to employ meaningful oral tasks, a focus on learner needs and feedback. In relation to this last point, Moyer (1999) finds phonological feedback to be positively correlated to high levels of pronunciation attainment. In a later study, Moyer (2004) concludes that L2 instruction is significant to attainment, while the instructional method is also important (i.e. communicative approaches are more effective than a focus on grammar or translation). Finally, it appears that cognitive involvement and reflexive practices also appear to be relevant in improving pronunciation proficiency (see Moyer, 2004; Hismanoglu, 2006; Huang, 2008).

In terms of phonological development and affective factors, several authors argue for the creation of a psycho-sociological environments which favour learning (see Morley, 1991). For many educators, this position may seem evident and aspects often considered at least partially dependent on classroom factors, such as motivation and anxiety would, at face value at least, appear important; nevertheless, some studies challenge or complicate this view. Research, such as that conducted by from Purcell and Suter (1980) or even Smit's (2002) study, indicates that motivation is an important factor but is not always dependent on the classroom environment; instead, it may often rest within external motivational factors, such as the desire for professional advancement. Pronunciation instruction is reported to interfere with student identity (see Setter & Jenkins, 2005). It is also the case that certain students may feel motivated to deliberately deviate from standard forms of pronunciation due to factors such as peer pressure (Lefkowitz & Hedgcock, 2006). Furthermore, Setter and Jenkins (2005) point to the dangers of treating students almost like patients of speech pathology and, among other recommendations, suggest that in the context of internationalization and given the potential encroachment of pronunciation instruction on identity, it might be more appropriate to encourage students to produce appropriate rather than native-like speech.

Many of the considerations mentioned within this section, including those relating to affective concerns are reflected in learner reports on their own phonological development. Vitanova and Millar (2002), for example, study the perceptions of university students with regards to pronunciation activities used in class. Based on the data obtained in this study, the authors draw four major conclusions:

1. Students value the teaching of both segmentals and suprasegmentals;
2. Value is attributed to reflective activities as well as learning and cognitive strategies;
3. Student preference is for a balance between controlled pronunciation tasks and more communicative approaches;
4. Socio-affective factors play an important role in the development of phonological control.

In Savignon and Wang (2003), EFL learners felt it was important for teachers to correct their pronunciation. In terms of affect and phonological development, Smit's (2002) study indicates the importance that factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy and evaluation by others had for university students at Vienna University who participated, and highlights the student perception that personal and individual involvement is among the most important factors for progress.

Despite the need for more research on the influence of classroom-dependent socio-psychological factors on pronunciation, it would appear fairly safe to assume that students who are bored with repetitive exercises may not feel particularly motivated towards improving their pronunciation. At the same time, learner anxiety, fear of failure or peer pressure are all factors which it would seem wise to take into account in the management of pronunciation teaching (see Tarone & Yule 1989).

With the diverse and sometimes conflicting reports on the effectiveness of strategies to improve pronunciation, it would appear difficult to be in any way prescriptive about how phonological control can or should be taught. In this sense, the *Common European Framework*'s descriptive stance on this aspect of communicative competence appears more than justified. However, evidence provided primarily from FL contexts and also studies from SLA and naturalistic settings does show that conscious training may be beneficial in developing learner competence in this area. Within this training, however, it would appear appropriate to take into account not only the development of accuracy in segmental and suprasegmentals, but also the need to incorporate this training in a contextualized and engaging fashion in such a way that student motivation towards the language is not diminished.

In the end, the question of context, which is configured by individual, classroom, educational, linguistic and geographical variables, is perhaps the most important factor to take into account. The present study by no means aims to tackle all of these questions, but does engage in a contextualised examination of possible trends in learner preferences, difficulties experienced in the learning of FL pronunciation.

3 STUDENT TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS ON PRONUNCIATION ACTIVITIES

3.1 Objectives and instruments

In this study, our main aim was to determine which procedures were commonly employed to practice pronunciation in the language classroom and to obtain the opinion of student teachers on the effectiveness of these procedures. Given the experience of student oral performance in the context in question, another objective was to identify reasons as to why students often failed to attain proficiency in pronunciation. The data for this study was to be obtained through closed and open questions contained within a survey addressed to student teachers. The construction of the questionnaire itself took on four stages:

1. Revision of authorized textbooks for English teaching in Primary and Secondary education
2. Semi-structured interviews with students (*n=10*) on activities they encountered in their previous experience of language learning in formal instructional settings
3. Initial design of the questionnaire
4. Piloting and revision of the final questionnaire.
5. The final version of the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 1.

In this study, we take the view that not all educational phenomena can be reduced to quantitative expressions, and it is often the case that certain aspects (beliefs, attitudes and values) cannot be fully subjected to experimentation procedure, but instead, need to be studied primarily through humanistic and interpretative approaches. With this in mind, the descriptive method of this study employs a survey to individuals who possess information and who communicate this by means of a written questionnaire. The design used in this study combines a quantitative non-experimental procedure using a descriptive statistics and a qualitative approach to the interpretation of open-ended responses.

A frequently employed measurement system used to quantify perceptions is the Lickert scale, which divides responses into categories of diverse numbers. While there appears to be no ideal number of response categories within this type of scale, it is accepted that five to seven categories is most appropriate (Domino & Domino, 2002: 132). The five-point Lickert scale is not without precedents, and has, indeed, been employed in perceived measures questionnaires in general education (e.g. Delaney & Huselid, 1996) and language teacher education (e.g. Kelly, Grenfell, Allan, Kriza, & McEvoy, 2004). In terms of judging the relative value of responses, it appeared useful to predetermine a cut-off point which would take into consideration those responses which had both a high score on the scale and a relatively homogenous level of responses between participants. The criteria established for this was that of a mean score greater than four and a standard deviation of less than one (see Kelly et al. 2004).

In terms of the qualitative part of our study, the first stage of textual analysis involves the use of text reduction in order to make data more manageable and to focus on recurring themes (Corbin & Holt, 2004). In order to facilitate the organisation of potential reasons behind possible failures in students to attain good levels of pronunciation, it is also necessary to find ways in which to group indicators. This type of analysis may consist in extracting taxonomies of major themes and minor categories from the data available by employing open coding, which initially involves the labelling of individual texts in more abstract categories (Patton, 1998).

An important element in the coding of data lies in the interpretive capacity of the researcher, which requires thorough insider knowledge of the system under study, however, at this particular stage of analysis there is also a danger that the interpretations given to texts may be subject to researcher bias. In order to reduce the influence of researcher subjectivity a number of strategies may be employed, including records of participant language, researcher triangulation and participant review (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

3.2 Sample

The sample for this study was selected according to non-probabilistic causal sampling, whereby the criteria for the selection of participants (in this case student teachers) depended on their availability to participate. The total number of respondents to the questionnaire, as well as distribution, is shown in Table 1.

Given the trend of student teacher population, the majority of participants in this study were female (75%) and all participants fell within the 20-25 year-old age category. The variables of participant age and gender were not taken into account in this study.

In all cases, we have respected the deontological or ethical norms regarding research involving individuals. Those who participated in the study did so freely and were aware of the nature of the nature of the research instrument and conditions. At the same time, it is important to mention that questionnaires were anonymous and efforts were made to guarantee student confidentiality at all times.

Table 1. Primary and Secondary Level Student Teachers

Diploma Students (Primary ELT student teachers)	107
Graduate Students of English Philology (Secondary ELT student teachers)	32
Graduate Students of Translation and Interpreting (Secondary ELT student teachers)	49
	Total: 189

3.3 Statistical and non-statistical procedures

The analysis of the results consisted in the completion of a series of statistical operations using the SPSS statistics package. Following Kelly *et al*. (2004), this involved the calculation of the mean score (>4) as a positive indicator of acceptance among participants, and standard deviation (<1) as a basic indicator of group homogeneity. The outcome of these calculations is discussed in the results section below. In addition to this the internal reliability of responses was calculated using the Cronbach coefficient, setting a cut-off point at $\alpha>0.8$ to compensate for possible alpha inflation based on item number. Finally, responses between groups (Primary vs. Secondary) are calculated through a *t*-test in order to find any possible significant differences.

In terms of the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses, the procedure was as follows:

1. text reduction to remove unintelligible responses and to make data easier to manage
2. open coding, which initially involved the labelling of individual texts in more abstract categories
3. axial coding, which consists in reweaving identified categories around major emerging themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Holt, 2004; Patton, 1988).

The above mentioned procedures were conducted by two researchers in order to avoid researcher bias.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative results

The reliability of the 23 items on the questionnaire measured using the Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated to be $\alpha = 0.893$, which appears to indicate an acceptable level of consistency. Table 2 shows the results obtained from the calculation of the mean scores and standard deviation for responses according to student teacher category. Significant differences are also calculated between groups of respondents ($\alpha<0.05$).

Of the six items which fulfilled the cut-off criteria of mean score and standard deviation, three of these involved a listening component: item 10, listening to texts; item 11, simultaneous listening and reading; and item 13, listening and repeating aloud. The first two of these includes the use of receptive skills (listening and listening or reading) and the latter involves both receptive and productive efforts. Another high-scoring activity which also included this receptive component, but which did not fulfil S.D. criteria, was item 12, watching films. The remaining two activities which fulfilled cut-off criteria involved oral production. These were item 15, reading aloud, and item 23, speaking in English with other people. Similarly, item 14, acting out dialogues, which also involved production skills, obtained a high score.

At the lower end of the scale, lesser importance was attributed to activities which involved the use of phonetic symbols, these included practicing with a phonetic transcript, the use of dictionaries and phonetic explanations. Activities involving the isolation of decontextualised sounds (items 1, 2, 6 and 7) also received lower scores.In general, albeit with a few exceptions, higher values appear to be attributed to situations which involve top-down communicative practice of the language, either real or simulated rather than bottom-up, more 'artificial' or non-communicative activities, which tend to have lower scores. The highest

scoring item which did not fulfill the cut-off criteria was that of teacher correction (mean=3.78). Although differences between Secondary and Primary teachers are not significant for this item, it can be observed that the former group do tend to view this aspect as being more important than the latter.

As for those results which do show significant differences, it is, perhaps, important to mention the fact that in general, Secondary student teachers appear to value global, communicative and implicit forms of instruction to a higher degree than Primary student teachers.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for student teacher responses

	Second-ary student teachers	Primary student teachers	Global	S.D.	Sig.
1 - Sound discrimination	2.82	3.85	3.52	1.06	0.72
2 - Individual word discrimination	2.86	3.27	3.13	1.04	0.09
3 - Identify similar sounds in words	3.14	3.68	3.51	0.85	0.00
4 - Discrimination of similar words in sentences	3.41	3.66	3.58	0.97	0.00
5 - Phonetic explanations	2.05	3.30	2.90	1.22	0.00
6 - Separation of sounds in syllables	2.43	3.53	3.19	1.16	0.00
7 - Identification of stressed syllables	3.10	3.43	3.32	0.99	0.04
8 - Discrimination of intonation models	3.05	3.68	3.49	0.98	0.14
9 - Identification of peer errors	2.90	3.45	3.28	1.22	0.93
10 - Listening to texts	4.41	4.23	4.29	0.80	0.48
11 - Simultaneous listening and reading	4.14	4.36	4.29	0.86	0.24
12 - Watching films	4.55	3.94	4.13	1.11	0.03
13 - Listening and repeating aloud	3.86	4.13	4.04	0.86	0.33
14 - Acting out dialogues	4.19	4.00	4.06	1.02	0.4
15 - Reading aloud	4.00	4.02	4.01	0.99	0.09
16 - Reading phonetically difficult sentences	3.16	3.53	3.42	0.94	0.01
17 - Teacher correction	3.36	3.98	3.78	1.17	0.21
18 - Tongue-twisters	2.23	2.94	2.71	1.03	0.00
19 - Clapping to the rhythm of sentences	2.38	3.17	2.93	0.98	0.00
20 - Using graphs and illustrations	2.10	3.38	3.00	1.33	0.32
21 - Practicing with phonetic transcripts	2.52	3.70	3.34	1.30	0.01
22 - Consulting the dictionary	3.14	3.66	3.49	1.19	0.13
23 - Speaking in English with other people (peer students, etc)	4.48	4.55	4.53	0.83	0.00

4.2 Qualitative results

Having analysed the open-ended responses and applied text reduction and open coding, five major categories emerge to explain the possible reasons behind student failure in the learning of pronunciation. These categories are presented below in order of importance:

1. Predominance of written activities over oral activities. The majority of those surveyed coincide in identifying that the main reason behind failure resides in their view that the teaching system does not pay enough attention to oral communication in class; instead, the tendency is to employ written activities rather than those which develop listening and speaking skills.
2. Predominance of grammar and lexical activities over oral and pronunciation activities. The majority of participants also indicate that much higher levels of emphasis are placed on the teaching and learning of grammatical structures and vocabulary, rather than on oral work and phonological control.
3. Lack of communicative competence and training at Primary level. Respondents tend to believe that Primary school teachers are found to be lacking in oral competence and communicative language training, and that subsequently, this has a negative impact on student performance.

In addition to the above, several respondents mention that students often feel embarrassed to express themselves orally in the foreign language or that they are afraid to look silly in front of their peers. Finally, a smaller number of participants state that an important cause of failure is attributed to the perceive fact that teachers do not regularly conduct classes in English and that the target language is not used continuously as an instrument of communication in the classroom.

5 DISCUSSION

In light of the results obtained from this study, it would appear that in this context student teachers prefer communicative activities which imply teacher-student and student-student classroom interaction as well as implicit or subconscious approaches to learning as opposed to more explicit and decontextualised forms of instruction.

On the one hand, this sits well with several studies in Communicative Language Teaching which argue for the integration of pronunciation tasks within a communicative context. At the same time, however, there are

elements which are more in tune with naturalistic approaches to language learning which predominantly arise from Second Language Acquisition, written in contexts where students are non-native speakers of a language immersed in the target language and culture. Depending on the learning context (e.g. bilingual vs. traditional schooling; initial age and frequency of contacts with native speakers abroad, etc.) this may pose a problem for those learning a foreign language in non-target language settings since, as studies mentioned earlier in this paper indicate, accurate pronunciation is often attained by consciously focusing on phonological aspects of the language to be learned. Yet it is precisely those aspects which do explicitly focus on pronunciation that receive lower scores.

This matter should perhaps be more fully addressed. While mimicry, through exercises of the listen-and-repeat type, obtains a relatively high score, other bottom-up activities, particularly those which involve some sort of phonetic challenge, are considered to be less useful. This might lead us to conclude that many of the activities experienced by student teachers during their own learning experience were for one reason or another 'unsatisfactory'. Among the possible explanations, we could surmise that this dissatisfaction may arise from: a) a perceived lack of value in the use of decontextualised fragments of text used exclusively to enhance pronunciation without taking into account the need for students to link their learning experiences with real-life situations; and b) subsequent demotivation of students and a consequent lowering of interest in acquiring improved phonological control.

Another concern, which rises from the qualitative part of this study, is that communicative approaches to phonological development are valued more by secondary student teachers than by primary teachers, whereas the pronunciation of isolated words and sounds obtain significantly higher scores among the latter group. It is possible that activities centred on words and sentences may prove to be easier to introduce into instructional practices in the primary classroom, in addition to the fact that they are more predominant in primary school textbooks.

The combination of the above considerations, the results obtained in both the qualitative and quantitative part of our study, and many of the considerations mentioned in the review of the literature leads us to suggest a series pedagogical implications which could be relevant for this context. Firstly, when considering the development of pronunciation in formal instructional settings, it would appear necessary to employ activities that engage student needs and interests. Without intending to be in any way prescriptive, we would suggest that students be engaged in the development of pronunciation in three ways: communicatively, cognitively and affectively.

In the first case, it would appear not only from our own study on the perception of student teachers and their own learning experience, but also

from the views expressed by experts professionally linked to the field of foreign language teaching, that the teaching of isolated texts has several limitations. In order to be able to communicate in the real world, students must have access to input as well as opportunities to produce understandable and meaningful exchanges. Exclusively explicit teaching of decontextualised sounds may enhance pronunciation, but without meaning these sounds may become irrelevant in the mind of the student.

Cognitively engaging activities, on the other hand may lend meaning to the process of pronunciation development. On one level, this could include the raising of student awareness on the need to improve pronunciation in order to make their own utterances more intelligible. At another level, certain contextualized tasks used in conjunction with other, more communicative activities, and which require students to consciously focus on and practice aspects of phonological identification and control may prove more useful in developing pronunciation than the use of top-down strategies alone. Finally, the affective aspects of pronunciation cannot be dismissed. Among other aspects, we could consider the role of student motivation to enhance pronunciation. This may be particularly relevant in terms of the establishment of classroom atmosphere which is conducive to student participation and includes appropriate forms of teacher feedback, which can play a vital role in the improvement of pronunciation. At the same time, affective concerns may also be linked to the previously mentioned areas of communicative and cognitive involvement, in the sense that the use of the language for real purposes and the awareness for the need to improve phonological control may add to a student's motivational disposition to pronounce better.

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APPENDIX 1

Figure 1. Questionnaire for Student Teachers

What exercises helped you most to learn how to pronounce the English language when you were a student in Primary and Secondary Education? Read the following activities and grade them according to their importance and contribution to the learning of English pronunciation. Use the following scale:

1 = no importance
2= little importance
3 = average importance
4 = important
5=very important

1. (…..) **Discriminating sounds** in words or minimal pairs that are pronounced in a clear voice
(ex.: Underline the word with /a:/, the students hear see *sun, car, cap, up*).
2. (…..) Identifying the word in a group given in the written form
(ex: find /ki:/ in the series *cake, queue, queen, key, king*)
3. (…..) Reading words and grouping those with the same sound
(ex.: Group these words under the appropriate sound: /o/ or /o:/ *saw, watch, talk, want, board, four*).
4. (…..) Contrasting, identifying and **discriminating** between similar **sentences** and expressions orally
(ex.: The students hear: *They're working-They're walking*; *We're Finnish-We're finished*)
5. (…..) Listening to **phonetic explanations** and rules on how sounds are pronounced
(ex.: /t/ is a breathed alveolar plosive which is articulated by placing/putting the tip of the tongue against/on the teeth-ridge).
6. (…..) Breaking up difficult sound combinations and reiterating their pronunciation orally
(ex.: *The six-teen-th of Feb-ru-a-ry*)
7. (…..) Discriminating **stress** patterns orally
(ex. Listening to several words and phrases and marking with capital letters the syllable with the main accent: it's a PEN, he's ENglish, etc.)
8. (…..) Discriminating **intonation** patterns orally
(ex.: Listening to sentences and say if they are statements, questions or exclamations. The students hear: *How nice! Where do you work? I'm drinking water*).
9. (…..) Listening for other mistakes
(ex.: Listening to our classmates trying to find the mistakes they make when they speak).
10. (…..) Listening to oral messages and **texts**: dialogues, poems, songs, etc.
11. (…..) **Listening** to oral texts and **reading** them at the same time
12. (…..) Watching video recordings: **films**, documentaries, etc.

13. (…..) **Listening and repeating** sentences and words after hearing the recording.
14. (…..) **Acting out** dialogues, simulations and role-plays.
15. (…..) **Reading texts** (dialogues, poems, songs) aloud (orthoepic)
16. (…..) Reading aloud of words and/or "seeded" sentences with difficult sounds (ex.: *This owl has found a brown mouse on the ground*).
17. (…..) **Being corrected** by the teacher while producing oral messages.
18. (…..) Reading **tongue twisters** (ex.: *She sells sea shells by the sea shore*).
19. (…..) Tapping out the rhythm and reading aloud
(ex.: When we or the teacher tap(s) out the words and syllables: one-two-three-four-five-once-I-caught-a-fish-a-live)
20. (…..) Use of **graphic elements**: looking at arrows, musical notes, contour lines, liaisons (links), boxes, illustrations of tongue position, etc for a better understanding and learning of phonetic aspects.
21. (…..) Learning phonetic symbols and practising the **phonetic transcription** of w and sentences
on the blackboard as a classroom exercise. (ex.: look at me /lukət mi:/)
22. (…..) Looking up the **dictionary** to see the transcription of words and check their pronunciation
23. (…..) Speaking and **interacting** with other people: classmates, the teacher, etc.

What, in your opinion, are the reasons behind the failure of students to learn to pronounce well in English?
……
……
……

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