Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation

The Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation in Online Classes in Three Latin American Countries

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Abstract

This research project presents the analysis of implementing pronunciation strategies on students who need to improve their pronunciation. Participants were students from different parts of Latin America and from basic levels, A1/A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), taking part in online classes at Berlitz Virtual Classroom (BVC). Qualitative methodology and action research method were used during the study to describe an existing issue and try to look for a solution to students needs at the EFL classroom. In the diagnostic stage, students' surveys, teachers' interviews and teacher's journal were implemented as instruments to collect information during the classes. The implementation stage took place making use of a cyclical method that included planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The results of this study show that learners can pronounce specific sounds, use linking words and stress patters in English better by using certain strategies in the EFL class, which results in fostering their oral production in terms of fluence and accuracy.

Keywords: communication, online learning, oral skill, pronunciation, strategies

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Introduction

Learning English is becoming more and more necessary for people around the world every day. Thus, many students are enrolling in courses that let them achieve a certain degree of proficiency. Nevertheless, there is a key aspect that is gaining importance these days: the speaking skill. Currently, there are many interactions among people worldwide with different purposes such as business, technology, education and traveling, among others. They are increasing the need to become competent speakers. In the context of this project, which includes learners from three countries of Latin America, there has been a slow process in strengthening bilingualism in comparison to other regions of the world according to international institutions like EF (Education First) that measures English levels in non-English speaking countries from around the globe. Now that the need to be competitive in the market has taken a main role, these countries have put a renewed emphasis on this subject.

At Berlitz, there is a very important emphasis on the speaking skill so that the company can answer to the customer needs and classes are focused on oral interaction. Nonetheless, there is little emphasis on using pronunciation strategies to help students improve their oral skill and therefore their communication. As a result, the purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of teaching explicitly pronunciation strategies for students during the lessons to be more conscious and capable of producing English in an accurate and fluent way.

This project resulted from my experience working with many learners through the years and identifying their struggles when producing the foreign language orally. Furthermore, I conducted a diagnostic stage where I could clearly verify this issue affecting students from basic to advanced levels by using three different instruments to collect data: students' surveys, teachers'

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interviews and researcher journal. Results showed a clear tendency to consider speaking skill as the main difficulty learners face at the moment of communicating in a foreign language. The research question states this main issue asking: what is the influence of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' oral production? The project uses a qualitative methodology and action research method in order to describe the problem and all the characteristics and possible causes as well as intervene with a suitable solution. Some of the main findings of the study include the improvement participants noticed after being instructed with pronunciation strategies, the usefulness of the different strategies (especially linking words), and the difficulty these strategies present to learners in the Latin American context.

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1. Research problem

1.1 Purpose of the Research.

Since I was learning English at school and college, I got very interested and fascinated with pronunciation strategies. I think their use helped me have my current level of language fluency and accuracy. As interacting in English is more common as time passes, and the market is requiring workers to be able to communicate in this language the best way possible, I consider pronunciation to be more relevant. According to the outcomes in the diagnostic stage, many of the participants take this aspect into account as a key factor in their learning process as well. It would be of great benefit to assess the influence of teaching these strategies during the EFL class at the moment of evaluating participants' oral production. There are not many projects of this kind going on; thus, I believe it is very innovative.

There can be several contributions of this project at different levels such as academic/scientific as I established before, there are not many projects about this topic going on. Assessing the impact of the teaching of pronunciation strategies may contribute to the practice of many teachers anywhere in the world, or more specifically in some countries in Latin America. Personally, it will enrich my professional practice as I will be able to identify the role of pronunciation strategies in the English language learning process. Furthermore, there can be an institutional impact because if I prove pronunciation strategies are useful in the Latin American context, the Hub could include this practice in the everyday lesson for all students.

From the point of view of pedagogy, this research study may also encourage many teachers to make more emphasis on the speaking skill, especially on pronunciation, developing research projects, experiments, class projects and curriculum adjustments, among others. In the

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specific context of this project, teacher communities from Mexico, Colombia and Argentina may take the results into account as a basis for improving the methodology regarding the teaching of speaking and pronunciation. In that sense, institutions that offer English courses may have something different to offer to their clients and that could lead to an improvement of the level of students. At the same time, it could help them to become more competitive in the global market, of course considering the results of the study by applying what proved to be useful and paying attention to what was not efficient.

1.2 Description of the Context and setting

The process of learning languages is every day more and more common and necessary for people all around the world. We are part of a globalized society that needs effective communication among its individuals. English is one of the most popular languages people choose to study and it has become a very important means of cultural exchange. This language is used all over the world for different purposes. For instance, making business, studying, traveling and using technology, among others. With the influence of technological advances, online Education is becoming a remarkable way for people to have access to a wide range of studies from the shortest and simplest (e.g. tutorials) to the most complex (Ph. D). The English teaching-learning process is not the exception to be affected by this phenomenon.

There are language schools which offer English courses everywhere; nevertheless nowadays learning English online is playing an important role considering its advantages. As we know, the world population is growing fast; urban centers are more overcrowded as time passes and citizens find it more difficult to move from one place to the other. Besides, transportation

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costs are high, that is why these are two main reasons why people prefer virtual learning (e-learning) instead of face-to-face classes.

In regards of the national context, according to studies made by the company, Colombians are moving little by little to online education, especially in big cities such as Bogotá. They find the advantages mentioned before and others feel more comfortable at their homes than in a classroom, having many audiovisual resources on the net, and being able to go on their pace more easily. To respond to these demands, Berlitz S.A., the non-formal education agency where this project was carried out, offers live interaction for the English learning process either face-to-face or online. I am a full-time teacher at Berlitz, an American language school that has branches all over the world. Berlitz was founded in 1878 and it is a very well-known company that offers the teaching of almost all existing languages worldwide. The organization has its own teaching method that was invented by its founder Maximilian Berlitz at that time; this method has been modified throughout the time by expert teachers and researchers and it has proved successful, mainly concerning the communicative competence, of students in the five continents (Berlitz, 2013). They offer courses starting from the most basic to the most advanced levels based on the CEFRL. Moreover, courses on business and tourism, among others, are offered to customers.

I am part of the "LATAM Hub" (Latin American group of teachers) and have students from the whole Latin American region, from Mexico to Argentina, who take English classes on Berlitz Virtual Classroom (BVC). Learners are adults of all ages, and they have different levels ranging from beginners, intermediate, and advanced also according to the CEFRL. They take classes in different levels of intensity; for instance, 1.5, 3, 4, 6 or 8 hours a week. The lessons are delivered 100% online using the Zoom platform which offers the possibility to have as many participants as the company requires, although most of the classes are private (one student) or

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with small groups (2-5 students). The majority of learners are professional people from every possible branch of science who are looking for a boost for their careers, because, as many of them say, "the market is increasing the need for bilingual people every day" or "English is more and more necessary as time passes". From my experience, I can infer that most of the students at Berlitz belong to middle and high socio-economic strata due to the cost of the courses they pay.

In relation to the method used to teach languages, the company focuses on Communicative Language Teaching and uses Task Based Language Teaching as support for the lesson's delivery process. As a very particular characteristic, Berlitz pays more attention to the speaking ability than the rest of its fellow language centers, that is why the slogan is "speak with confidence". The classes are mainly based on audio-oral communication and among the corporate principles we can find "maximized students` participation" and "focus on speaking and listening, with the support of reading and writing". In addition, every lesson has a "speaking goal" that is established at the beginning and is fulfilled by its end. The lessons, which commonly last 45 minutes or 1 hour, are divided into 5 parts: Warm-up, Presentation, Practice, performance and closing. There are textbooks for students and instructors, as well as class slides and illustration books for every course at the instructor portal which consists of an online platform that contains all the material used throughout the lessons.

The EFL curriculum at Berlitz is based on the standards of the CEFRL; the content is organized going from the simplest topics (e.g. introduce yourself) to the most advanced (e.g. conduct a meeting at work). There is not a formal syllabus and the textbooks set the content we should cover on a determined course. These textbooks are for each level and each kind of courses; for instance, general, business, tourism, or any other kind of English for specific purpose. They are used as the content basis in all classes. Although teachers have an instructor

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manual that suggests all the activities in all the phases of the lessons, recommending from "how to do the warm-up" to "what performance tasks to do", they have the possibility to introduce adaptations in their planning according to the learners' needs.

Regarding the evaluation system, there is a significant value assigned to class performance (follow-up activities based on the speaking goal previously mentioned) that corresponds to the 70% percent of the whole assessment. Moreover, customers must comply with extra activities from the student`s book or online practices at the student's portal. Besides, they should attend a minimum of 80% of lessons for each level to be able to pass the course. Additionally, there is a "progress test" at the end of the level weighing 20% that learners have to present to achieve 100% of the assessed items.

Berlitz offers classes from 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. I work from home and get the schedule for the day the previous business day at 18:00 h.; this schedule is different every day and it depends on the number of classes the company must comply with and the number of teachers who are available to teach each day. I teach different students almost every day (students have a limited rotation of instructor per level) and there are periodic meetings with coordinators and colleague teachers to discuss diverse topics related to the pedagogical planning, for example, topics such as the new kind of lessons we are going to be delivering, the resources to use, the evaluation process, They are called TTT (time to talk) lessons which last 20 minutes and the main purpose is to let students speak without interruptions about any conversation topic they would like, and at the end I should give them feedback on their fluency.

At the end of levels two, four, six, eight and ten, students receive a certification reporting their English proficiency level regarding the CEFRL (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1) respectively. The company's customers need to pay for their courses on a monthly basis.

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1.3 **Description of the problem**

There exist several difficulties and drawbacks when teaching English as a foreign language in Latin America. For instance, the influence of mother tongue, in this case Spanish, that directly affects the approach learners have towards the learning process. The fact that Spanish is pronounced the same way it is written makes it very challenging for students to deconstruct that feature previously 'installed' in their heads. Furthermore, there are all the specific features in the English pronunciation system that makes it complex to learn. In addition, there is a tendency to leave pronunciation in a second or third place of importance in many English programs or courses all along the region.

As long as the diagnostic stage was developed, it could be found that participants had had little to no instruction, training or practice of the pronunciation skill as they took English courses in a great variety of institutions and contexts. For instance, most of them agreed in the fact that they had never seen the International Phonetic Alphabet. Likewise, a vast majority of participants had never been taught strategies regarding linking words or intonation and stress patterns. Regardless of this fact, students from Mexico to Argentina expressed they considered pronunciation at the top of important skills to be learned throughout their English learning process.

This particular context derived in the research problem which had to do with students' difficulty to communicate effectively in English due to pronunciation issues. Most of the participants are professional or businesspeople who need to communicate in English orally in order to develop tasks, do negotiations, or transmit important information, among others. Consequently, they need to have, apart from the grammatical and lexical knowledge, the ability

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to be intelligible, which means, to be understood without much hesitation. For that purpose, a correct pronunciation and a natural rate of delivery is indispensable and, at the same time, this aspect would lead them to better understand and improve their listening comprehension.

1.4 **Research question and objectives**

1.4.1 Research question: What is the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' pronunciation in online classes in 3 Latin American countries?

1.4.2 Objectives

General objective: To determine the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies through online classes on learners' pronunciation in Latin America.

Specific objectives

- To analyze the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on students' performance when pronouncing English.
- To explore how segmental and supra segmental features of pronunciation affect learners' fluency and accuracy when speaking.
- To establish the effectiveness of each pronunciation strategy separately on learners' oral performance.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

The main goal of this theoretical framework is to illustrate the reader with the perspectives of different authors about the several topics this research project embraces. For that purpose, it is divided into two sections: the first one regarding method and pedagogy in general going from the broader to the more specific. The second one about the topic of this study in regards to the speaking skill and pronunciation. Methods and pedagogy in the first section include Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based learning and pronunciation strategies. In the second section, there can be found oral production, fluency and pronunciation.

2.1.1 Communicative Language Teaching

As established in many theories regarding communicative approach, the ultimate goal of any ESL-EFL class is to develop learners' communicate competence through a variety of tasks or activities. According to Richards (2005), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a learner-centered approach where teachers are no longer regarded as knowledge givers and learners not knowledge receivers. Meanwhile, Brown (2007), Communicative Language Teaching is seen as "an eclectic blend of the contributions of previous methods" into an approach which goes beyond the teaching of "rules, patterns, definitions, and other knowledge about language" to the teaching of genuine, spontaneous, and meaningful communication. The traditional practice of grammar teaching, therefore, receives much less attention while fluency development is critical in CLT classes.

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Littlewood (1981) states that the communicative approach helps to broaden our perspective on language and language learning. The mere mastery of linguistic forms and structures (grammar and vocabulary) are not the end goal of language learning anymore, yet we begin to consider language in terms of its communicative functions because only mastering the structure of a language is not enough for students to function in real situations outside the classroom. Therefore, the CLT approach aims to provide students with opportunities and strategies to build up their communicative competence, a concept very central to CLT. Similarly, Lightbown and Spada (2013) see CLT as an approach to teaching which emphasizes the communication of meanings in interaction rather than the practice of grammatical forms in isolation. They believe that successful language learning involves not only knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings.

Furthermore, the concept of communicative competence refers to our abilities to interact with other speakers through meaning negotiation within particular social contexts and it includes both "grammatical competence or knowledge of the rules of grammar and sociolinguistic competence or knowledge of rules of language use" (Brown, 2007). Thus, the notion of communicative competence involves knowledge of the language and the ability to apply the underlying knowledge in real communication in appropriate contexts. Put it in another way, communicative competence involves knowing what to say, what not, and how, when, and where to say it appropriately with different interlocutors.

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2.1.2 Task based learning.

Task Based Learning, also called Task Based Instruction (TBI), is an analytical approach to language pedagogy in which students are exposed to holistic chunks of language that they can analyze themselves. It is a linguistic action or task that learners are required to perform. The completion of this task will generate new language or new avenues of learning (Prabhu, 1987). According to Willis (1996), in a TBI focused class the sequence is often different from that of the PPP (presentation, practice and produce) cycle. One such popular cycle of learning presented by him is as follows: A pre-task introducing the topic and the task, task planning, doing the task and presenting the task report. Finally, Nunan (2004) describes TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching) as an approach to the design of language courses where the focus is not a list of linguistic items but a set of tasks that also includes the experimental and humanistic side of the target language.

This research project made use of TBI as an extra help for designing of the workshops focused on pronunciation strategies. It facilitated the delivery of the lessons as there was a pre-task consisting of presenting the new language, vocabulary, expressions and structure, a main task divided in two parts; the first focused on the presentation and practice of the pronunciation strategies and the second the communicative performance of the participants, and at the end a post-task which was a feedback session and summary of the activity. There are several authors supporting the idea that TBI promotes the development of the speaking skill in language learners. For instance, Gass et al. (1999) results indicated that task repetition would lead to greater overall proficiency. Furthermore, it resulted in greater fluent language production, an expectable finding given the suggestion that fluency is a context-dependent construct.

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Moreover, Lynch and McLean (2000) stated that Learners' familiarity with the content and context of a particular task through performing it earlier allows them to be more productively fluent in their subsequent performances. In addition, they found that task repetition would advantage both linguistic accuracy and fluency. Besides, House (1996) affirmed the improvisation skills resemble the skills included under strategic competence in the communicative competence models. It involves the use of discourse processing strategies to evaluate communicative effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments. Thus, conversational skills models consider both discourse competence and pragmatic competence, explained by the communicative competence model, a dialogic phenomenon that combines both pragmatic appropriateness of utterances and smooth continuity in ongoing talk.

In the literature of TBI, there is usually a place for oral production as one of the main aims for any language learner. Richards (2006) notes that learning in TBL context will emerge from creating an opportune environment for interactional processes in the classroom, using the available resources from this methodology, such as the contextual facts, students' interest and prior knowledge on the topics. It is a methodology that seeks to generate changes in the processes of language teaching, through interaction and rehearsal of real-life situations under classroom-controlled situations, that generates confidence in the students, which increases the will of learning a second language, having in mind the real importance of it for the different life instances.

A task is understood as any daily activity performed with a practical purpose, from making a bank transaction to booking a flight, the multiple actions that people take part in every day at work, play or life (Long, 1985). According to Nunan (2004) in the classroom, a task becomes a meaningful activity that goes beyond the mere form of it as it represents the rehearsal

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of a real-life situation performed under classroom conditions; thus, the task is considered a

relevant part of the educational experience that aims to deal with the achievement of

communicative outcomes. Also, Willis (1996) states that the priority while assigning tasks is the

focus on meaning rather than language form. Using tasks promotes an active use of L2,

providing scenarios to interact and exchange ideas, and seeking to solve assigned tasks in the

classroom. For ESL teaching, teachers need to identify what students' need regarding their

language development and take into account other specific elements that permit them to plan

customized tasks, which foster the use of one or various language skills.

2.1.3 Pronunciation strategies

Learning to pronounce correctly in English is not an easy task for the majority of students all

around the world, and one of the main reasons is the lack of time and emphasis teachers give to

this skill in the ESL classroom. To support this idea, Kenworthy (1987) who states that at the

moment of learning pronunciation, learners face not only the linguistic features of the language

but also the way of approaching this knowledge in an appropriate way. Furthermore, Hammerly

(1991) states that the communicative approach presents a lack of importance to structural

knowledge, in this case specially talking about pronunciation, with the conception that they will

eventually disappear with students' interaction which at the end of the day does not occur in the

majority of cases.

There are other misconceptions and drawbacks around the concept of teaching

pronunciation such as lack of knowledge; teachers may feel uneasy to teach this because of lack

of training in phonetics and linguistics. Subject knowledge, which includes the knowledge of

second language acquisition, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, cultural knowledge,

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language awareness and language proficiency is the foundation of a teacher's professional

experience to be able to teach pronunciation effectively. It is also known that as most of the

attention of the ESL class is for interaction and communication nowadays, then, institutions at

the local level such as schools or universities or at national or international level as governments

try to limit the time and effort teachers should put into that subject matter.

When it comes to pronunciation strategies, I would like to mention that the focus of this

project is not helping learners perfect their pronunciation to sound more beautifully or for them

to have that knowledge installed in their heads but encouraging them to improve their

pronunciation in order to reach an acceptable level of intelligibility. Intelligibility, understood as

to be easily and comfortably understood by competent speakers of the language (Ur, 1996) or to

be easily and comfortably understood by competent speakers of the language (Derwing and

Munro, 1997). In addition, Gass and Selinker (2001) state that without intelligibility,

communication is impossible. Considering all areas of language, errors with pronunciation and

word choice are the 2 most likely to make a student incomprehensible.

With that in mind, pronunciation should be taught in all levels of students as long as

intelligibility is an issue. Thus, teachers must always draw attention to unintelligible speech,

asking the student to repeat or rephrase more carefully. It has also been observed that improving

pronunciation leads to an improvement in the learner's listening comprehension. Gilberts (1987)

describes pronunciation and listening comprehension as "speech loop between speaker and

listener. Instruction in one, improves performance in the other. Moyer and Levis (2014)

conducted research which confirmed that learners who were exceptionally good at phonology

reported using pronunciation learning strategies such as self-monitoring, imitation of native

speakers, attention to difficult phonological terms and explicit concern for pronunciation

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accuracy. In addition, Dadour and Robbins (1996) showed that students who were taught

pronunciation strategies used these strategies more often, and therefore their speaking skills were

better than those of students without strategy instruction.

One of the first aspects of teaching pronunciation has to do with the ability a learner

should have to recognize the different sounds of the target language as well as the stress,

intonation and rhythm patterns. Besides, it is important for students to recognize native

pronunciation apart from foreign language learner pronunciation. Imitation, minimal pairs

exercises and contrasting acceptable and unacceptable pronunciation are ways to realize that

competence. Otherwise, today, a more balanced approach, including important consonants and

vowels as well as suprasegmental is recommended Dauer (2005).

This idea was also supported by Jenkins (2002) who said that teachers should focus on

pronunciation that promotes intelligibility such as primary consonants, some vowels and

suprasegmental. Based on these two authors, and the ones mentioned above mentioning the

advantages of learning pronunciation strategies, I came up with the ideas for the workshops

developed during this research project. Those workshops included primary consonant sounds (as

a segmental feature of pronunciation), which do not exist in Spanish (as mother tongue of my

students), stress patterns, intonation and linking words (as suprasegmental features of

pronunciation). There was more emphasis on suprasegmental features as they appear to have a

greater impact on intelligibility assessments than accurate pronunciation of consonants and

vowels (Celce-murcia et al. 1996).

Pennington & Rogerson-Revell (2019) state that technology should not be left aside

during this time of digital spread. The implementation of different technological advances can

help teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning specifically in the

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pronunciation subject. With software such as Voki or different mobile apps that check and correct pronunciation, learners have the possibility to practice beyond the ESL classroom and the teacher supervision. Every time, these kinds of tools become more precise and advance towards the autonomy of the student, making it easier for many people around the world to have access to this scientific knowledge that was exclusively found in the English class.

2.2.1 Oral production

Speaking a language embraces different aspects and challenges for every individual. According to Hughes (2002), the nature of speaking makes this skill inherent to many other areas of study. For instance, culture, linguistic features and context where the language is used. As she stated, teaching speaking overlaps with other objectives during the class such as sociocultural and pragmatic aspects. She affirms that determining the appropriate language for speaking acts is quite more complex than it is spontaneous. Apart from this, she also says that there are several differences between spoken and written language. As an example of that, speaking is informal and short-term lasting while written language is planned, more formal and endures through time.

Furthermore, spoken language should be corrected after it was delivered to the receiver, while written language can be corrected as many times as needed before being transmitted. In addition, Hughes mentions some aspects of researching speaking such as the difficulty to collect data that the researcher faces. Besides, conversation analysis and discourse analysis can also interfere with research purposes while working on speaking skills. Bachman and Palmer (1996) had also mentioned aspects of researching speaking previously. They said that the research can be focused on many aspects of speech such as linguistic components (segmental or suprasegmental features of language), discourse competence (pragmatic features), strategic

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competence (communication strategies), or socio-linguistic competence (ability to recognize

dialects, slang, register, cultural reference and figures of speech).

According to Byrne (1991) learners have to be taught to speak as well as to listen. Both

linguistic abilities are such common activities in the daily routine that we seem to get confused

thinking we are experts when we are only users. Successful conversation requires good listeners

as well as good speakers. Brown & Yule (2001) define the transactional aspect as the transfer of

information, and the interactional as the key element for maintaining social relationships. Brown

& Yule (2001) state that teachers should realize that simply training the student to produce short

turns will not automatically yield them to produce long turns. In general, despite students are

exposed to L2 in class, they cannot express themselves effectively when they are asked to

participate orally in communicative activities. According to Nunan (1993), this may happen

because there is no distinction between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use

them effectively and appropriately when communicating. By the same token, learners feel that

they have to perform perfectly from the first time they try to speak partly because teachers

sometimes highlight accuracy rather than fluency, and thus errors are not considered part of their

learning process.

According to Florez (1999), there are certain skills good speakers have in order to be

successful in oral communication. For instance, speakers must anticipate and then produce the

expected patterns of a specific situation. Besides, they should manage some specific skills such

as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback or redirecting, as well as producing the sounds,

stress patterns, rhythmic structure and intonation of the language. Furthermore, using speech

grammar structures accurately and assessing the audience to select registers and topics to be

covered during the interaction. Additionally, select the appropriate lexicon to be more

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understandable for the interlocutors. Also, making emphasis on key aspects and checking listeners comprehension. And finally, using body language and non-linguistics aids in general and managing an appropriate rate of delivery according to the people involved in the conversation. All of these abilities are the result of so much practice, but also specific knowledge acquired in formal training.

Likewise, O'Malley & Valdez (1996) state different inquiries about the nature of oral language. For example, "what roles do the native language and prior experience play in oral language development of a second language?"; besides, they question the role of the listener not as a passive, but as active and dynamic. In the discussion of the questions stated before, the authors conclude that native speakers do not use complete sentences when speaking, and that they use less specific vocabulary. They also use syntax in a disorganized manner and make frequent use of discourse markers. In addition, information is packed less densely in oral language with more use of phrases and simple sentences. At the same time, they state that a proficient speaker is a good listener; the construction of meaning starts when the speaker is listening and interpreting what is said. They say that syntactic knowledge allows the listener to chuck incoming discourse into segments and sociocultural knowledge helps him/her determine the most plausible meaning of spoken language.

Richards (1983) states that the most important aspect to take into account is the meaning of propositions that is what the listener retain, and not the actual words or grammatical structures uttered. Finally, according to Hughes (2012), speaking targets the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic aspects of communication meaning speaking must aim at phonetics, phonology, syntax, morphology, lexicon, intonation, and discourse analysis, taking into consideration the target population.

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2.2.2 Fluency.

Fluency, as established in the CEFRL can be defined as producing the language intelligibly, with

an appropriate level of accuracy and with a natural rate of delivery (with no so much hesitation).

Consequently, it plays an essential role in communication or the communicative competence as it

groups important aspects of the speaking skill. According to Derwing & Morton (2006), fluency

refers to how easy spoken production is understood by listeners. In other words, the easier

listeners understand input, the more fluent the speaker is. Furthermore, Richards (2005) states

that fluency is the natural use of language for meaningful communication, meaning that output

must be comprehensible when being used naturally. Language learners then must focus on

different factors to become fluent: for instance, he/she must make an accurate use of segmental

and suprasegmental features of pronunciation, as well as stress patterns and intonation.

Moreover, they must practice the necessary amount of time to be able to have a natural, not

necessarily native-like, rate of delivery (speed when speaking).

Widdowson & Segalowitz (2000) say fluency refers to the speaker's ability to use both

compensation and facilitation skills such as fillers, ellipsis, rephrasing, among others, to deal

with fast communication. All of these aspects have to do with the communicative competence as

well and make this field of study even broader. Otherwise, Nelson (2015) states five myths that

affect a learner's fluency: firstly, age. It is a common myth that the older a person is, the more

difficult it is to learn something new.

Nevertheless, science has proven that our brain is capable of learning something new

even though we are a hundred years old. Secondly, the fear of making mistakes; this is in fact a

reason why many people do not usually want to change or try something new. Being afraid to

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"lose face" can inhibit a person from practicing English, though the effect should be the opposite. The author says the mistakes are the ultimate way of learning a language. Thirdly, "you cannot remember all the rules of grammar". She states that even native speakers do not follow all the rules; then, it should not be a learner's concern to do that. Fourthly, "you need to travel to be able to speak English fluently". Nelson (2015) affirms that this is a fallacy and that there are many people who have learned English so well without visiting an English-speaking country. The writer argues that not having people who speak English around us is not necessarily an aspect that is going to hold us back in our process. There are many other misconceptions around the language learning process, specifically English in this case, that should be reconsidered by the learners at the moment of starting the process.

2.2.3 Pronunciation

The pronunciation of a language, in this specific case English, has a lot of rules different from many other languages. These rules are mostly arbitrary and cause a big challenge to speakers of other languages. There has been a renewed recognition that pronunciation is a crucial element of effective communication and belongs in communicative ESL classrooms. Lane (2010) argues that ESL students give pronunciation a high priority, but teachers may feel uneasy to teach this because of lack of training in phonetics and linguistics. As a result, despite its recognized importance to communication, pronunciation is still marginalized in many ESL programs.

It is important to establish the main goal of teaching pronunciation in class; Ur (1996), clarifies that the objective of teaching pronunciation is not to make learners achieve a native-like accent. It is to help them have enough accuracy to be easily and comfortably understood by competent speakers of the language. More realistic pronunciation goals are intelligibility,

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confidence when speaking and a reduction in accent features that can distract the listener's attention from intelligible messages. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) recommend that peers listen for a particular feature of pronunciation. Suprasegmental features appear to have a greater impact on intelligibility assessments than accurate pronunciation of consonants and vowels. Training of this skill should be focused on pronunciation that promotes intelligibility such as primary consonants, some vowels and suprasegmental. Furthermore, Jenkins (2000) states that in English most two-syllable nouns are stressed on the first syllable.

Nonetheless, about sixty percent of two-syllable verbs are stressed on the second syllable. Such characteristics of the language could be a great help for learners that are at the beginning or in the middle of the process of getting an accurate pronunciation of English. Moreover, Field (2005) says stressing the wrong syllable can make a word unrecognizable and completely disrupt a speaker's message; thus, focusing on stress patterns may become a huge difference between students who are trained on these skills from students who are not. Anderson and Venkatagiri (1994) affirm that it was found that native speakers stressed syllables were four times longer than unstressed ones. They also found that verbs with prepositional prefixes carry the stress on the root. On the other hand, compound nouns carry the stress on the preposition. Most compounds carry the stress on the first word: post office, office building compounds with prepositions carry the stress on the first syllable: takeoff, makeup. All of these linguistic aspects of the language can make a learner advance much faster in his/her learning process.

Gass and Selinker (2001) state that nativelike accent is not necessary for effective communication in English. However, without intelligibility, communication is impossible. Considering all areas of language, errors with pronunciation and word choice are the two most likely to make a student incomprehensible. Intelligibility refers to the degree a listener can

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recognize utterances, according to Derwing and Munro (1997). Continuing with Gass and Selinker (2001), they establish that pronunciation should be taught in all levels of students as long as Intelligibility is an issue. They also argue that pronunciation can be integrated with other coursework, providing reinforcement of vocabulary, content or grammar.

The rules for English stress placement are complex because English has borrowed many words from other languages, especially French, Latin, Spanish, and Greek, with different rules for assigning stress (Juffs l990). In addition, Dauer (2005) argues that it is difficult to speak English at a natural speed without reducing unstressed vowels. Besides, words with suffixes such as -tion or -sion stress goes to the syllable before the suffix. For the suffix -eer, the stress goes to the suffix. Some suffixes do not cause stress shift: -ment, -ness, -y, -ful. Rhythm (sentence stress and adjacent words) is a key suprasegmental issue to take into account. This information is hardly found in any type of language courses; in despite of that, many authors conclude it could be of great help for learners to have contact with this kind of data to be able to improve in this area of the language.

Gilakjani (2019), establishes that pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills in the learning and teaching of English language. He says that pronunciation has been overlooked and no serious attempt has been made to indicate its worth to both teachers and learners. English pronunciation is one of the least favorite areas for teachers to teach in their classes. They say that pronunciation instruction is not appropriate, because it is purely a motor-skill. The author indicates that pronunciation can and should be taught and it is an important part of communication that has a key role in Communicative Language Teaching.

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2.3 Previous related studies

Pronunciation Learning Strategies Studies

The field of pronunciation learning research has attempted to discover which areas of pronunciation are most beneficial for instructors to teach. Second language researchers have yet to discover how second language learners tackle difficult pronunciation learning tasks through the use of learning strategies. According to Taylor (2007) on his research "A Correlation of Pronunciation Learning Strategies with Spontaneous English Pronunciation of Adult ESL Learners", There is a gap in relation to what pronunciation strategies are known to be more efficient for learners. Furthermore, there is not a clear correlation between the implementation of pronunciation strategies a good pronunciation.

The results of his research show that adult ESL learners would be less inclined to use on a regular basis such systems as the International Phonetic Alphabet or other phonetic systems to help them improve their English pronunciation because such systems are often time consuming to learn and interpret. On the other hand, the study showed that it is very common for language learners to use some strategies such as reducing speed of pronunciation to control the difficulty it presents.

Another study that was developed by Sardegna (2011) states that participants clearly showed short-term improvement with linking while reading aloud. After four months of instruction on and practice with pronunciation learning strategies for improving linking, students' scores increased significantly. In fact, a close look at students' individual scores from T1 (test 1) to T2, and from T1 to T3 revealed that all participants improved short-term and long-term regardless of individual learner differences. The results indicate that the methodology used during the course

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may have facilitated such improvement. These findings provide evidence in support of the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction and in favor of empowering students with explicit pronunciation rules that they can use to self-correct and self-monitor their speech production.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Type of study

This study adopted a qualitative methodology with the aim of giving plenty of description on the subject matter which was identified through the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' pronunciation in online classes in Latin America. It supports the data collection process by carrying out questionnaires, external observations, and the teacher´s journal. Then, the reflection and interpretation stage allow me to identify from particular to more general themes that can facilitate the understanding of an educational intervention. According to Richards (2003), qualitative methods in language teaching must depict and explain how approaches develop potential abilities in language learning. Merriam, (1998) explains that "This type of research is used to help the researchers to understand how people feel and why they feel as they do; to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researchers." (p.6). It means that to understand this phenomenon, an ongoing, dynamic and changeable type of study is appropriate as participants´ words and narratives found in the data collecting instruments was strongly considered in the interpretative analysis to then categorize data according to emerging themes.

An Action Research was conducted to diagnose a problem and then to be solved following a set of suggested stages. Burns (1999). The steps include planning, action, observation, and
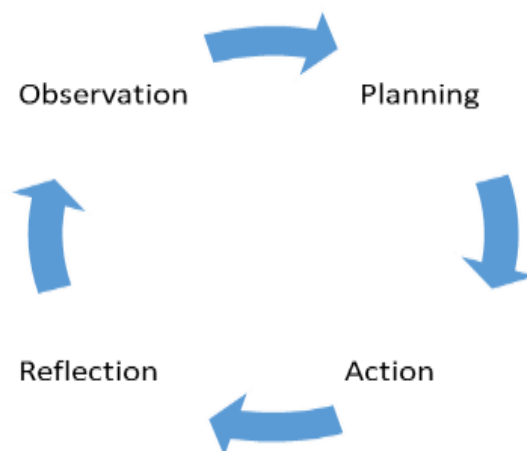
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reflection. These actions represent the essence of the approach, and they imply researchers not only to become effective observers but also to be organized with the data gathered from the instruments used in the different stages of the research methodology. That is to say, the linking between the terms action and research seeks to improve both student learning and teacher effectiveness solving daily problems.

Action research also suggests that reflecting about issues found during the triangulation of the diagnostic stage, using data collection techniques, analysis and interpretation of the information to have a real impact on the learning process of the participants. This action research seeks to propose a pedagogical intervention to generate language knowledge and understanding through a specific teaching approach as well as identifying the impact of the approach on students` language performance.

Figure 1

An action research cycle. Adapted from The Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral/Cycle.

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3.2 **Participants**

This research project was developed with different small groups of students. In total, there were five groups and 21 students participating in the process. These students were from different countries in Latin America; essentially, Mexico and Colombia, but there was also a participant from Argentina. I chose to develop the research with students from levels A1 / A2 according to CEFRL. Nevertheless, there were differences among learners from every particular group, who are supposed to be at the same proficiency level, but had a distinct academic background, contact with the language, time of study, and others. Most of the learners participating in the study were female, with a ratio of fifteen to six in relation to the males. Ages ranged from eighteen to around fifty years old and most of them were professional people working in different fields and who needed English for professional development.

3.*3* **Instruments**

Table 1

Data Collection Instruments

DIAGNOSTIC STAGE			
Technique	**Instrument**	**Rationale**	**Author**
Questionnaires (non-observational)	Students' survey	To identify the main issues students face when learning English in the online class.	Burns (2001)
Interview	Teachers' interviews	To know teachers' perceptions about main difficulties and drawbacks students encounter during class.	
Notes and diaries (observational)	Journal	To record information the teacher-researcher find in his experience as a	

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		BVC online instructor.	
IMPLEMENTATION STAGE			
Technique	**Instrument**	**Rationale**	**Author**
Questionnaires (non-observational)	Students' survey	To collect data on participants' ideas about the implementation stage.	Burns (2001)
External observation	Non-Participant observation	To report and reflect about students' performance when being instructed with pronunciation strategies.	
Notes and diaries (observational)	Journal	To collect information related to the implementation of the workshops by the teacher-researcher.	

4. Research stages

4.1 Diagnostic stage:

In this section, the results of coding process to the instruments applied in the diagnostic stage that include questionnaires to learners, interviews to teachers and teacher-researcher journal are presented and analyzed. These results were based on the information gathered for three weeks and with the cooperation of around twenty students and three teachers. The triangulation process was developed taking into consideration the seven most important categories that aroused from the data in terms of highest frequency. The table below presents the codes, operationalization, instruments and total percentages of the diagnostic of this project.

Table 2

Triangulation in Diagnostic Stage.

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Code/Category	Operationalization	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS			Total	Percentage
		SURVEY	INTERVIEWS	JOURNAL		
Positive perception of virtual program	Code describes respondents' positive perception of virtual program methodology and resources.	64	18	5	87	43,3%
Need for class time	Code describes respondents' perception of the influence of having time for the learning process.	7	2	7	16	8,0%
Speaking difficulties	Code describes respondents' negative perception of Speaking as the most difficult ability in the learning process.	6	1	8	15	7,5%
Weaknesses in the online program	Code describes respondents' negative perception of virtual program methodology and resources.	16	8	5	29	14,4%
Importance of vocabulary	Code describes respondents' perception of the importance of vocabulary knowledge.	0	12	5	17	8,5%
Importance of fluency	Code describes respondents' perception of the importance of the fluency ability.	2	12	4	18	9,0%

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Importance of pronunciation	Code describes respondents' perception of the importance of pronunciation knowledge.	3	12	4	19	9,5%
TOTALS		98	65	38	201	100,0%

Table 2 evidences that there is a clear tendency towards the positive factors the teaching process in the virtual learning environment offers. With 35.4 % this category is the highest in terms of frequency and shows respondents acceptance of the methodology. Among the comments on the advantages of the online program I gathered, there are some that are constantly repeated: time management, easy access, possibility to connect anywhere and comfortability to study from home or work. Students feel more confident taking the lessons at their places and express a great pleasure not having to go to a language center and spending much time and money on it specially in big cities where most of them live

On the other hand, I can find the negative perceptions respondents have regarding the online program. The frequency is much lower than the one of positive ideas, but still has an important 11.8 %, which needs to be taken into account as an opportunity of improvement. The most common factors learners argue are for instance difficulties they experience when not having a stable connection and lack of class time to advance in a better way in the process.

The third most frequent category has to do with language itself and is related to the importance of pronunciation. With a total of 19 frequencies, respondents expressed the crucial aspects of having English pronunciation knowledge. As we know, the pronunciation system in English differs so much to the one of Spanish. This aspect causes so much trouble for Spanish speakers who want to learn English and its pronunciation in a correct way. Therefore, several

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students I have talked to, express their concern about this specific knowledge that they consider

essential in their learning process.

Fluency, defined in the CEFRL as the ability to produce the language intelligibly, with an

appropriate level of accuracy and with a natural rate of delivery, with no so much hesitation, is

the fourth aspect with the most frequency in the data gathered. Learners consider this factor to be

fundamental when producing the language orally and they express the high challenge it presents

to speak naturally. During my observation, I noticed that several students need very much "extra

time" to build ideas in their minds to be able to produce them. Teachers at the company try to

correct learners at the presentation and practice stage as much as we can. Nevertheless, when

they are in the performance stage, we never correct them with the intention for them to gain

speaking confidence.

Another key aspect of language learning has to do with vocabulary. Many participants

expressed the great difficulty that they encounter when trying to find the appropriate lexicon to

express themselves. With seventeen frequencies (6.9 %) this aspect is the fifth most important in

the diagnostic stage. I have noticed a lot of frustration from students when they do not know a

word that they need to convey their idea. In addition, some of the participants of the diagnostic

stage belong to General Business English courses which means they have even more vocabulary

to learn and manage apart from the basic one. These English for Specific Purpose courses have

long lists of technical lexicon which is necessary to be taught and practiced throughout the

lessons.

Otherwise, there is a category that does not have to do with language which is lack of

class time. As it is known, English (or any other language) needs students to devote a great

amount of time to have a successful learning process. People who take courses at the company

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are, in a huge majority, professional people who work for companies in big cities all over Latin

America. They commonly have long working schedules and have to deal with traffic and other

issues that do not allow them to take some extra time to study or practice their English. As I

realized during an interview with a teacher who has worked during eight years in the company,

usually learners come to class not knowing nor preparing the material and topics to be discussed.

The online program has helped them to save an important amount of time as they do not have to

spend it on going to a Berlitz center to take the lessons; nonetheless, they have so many work

and family tasks and other responsibilities.

4.2 **Instructional design**:

Based on the results of the diagnostic stage, my concern is addressed to the oral skill and its

components that showed to be the weakest language skill identified by participants. If I consider

the codes on table 2 above, speaking difficulties had a 7.5 %, importance of fluency was 9 % and

importance of pronunciation registered a 9.5% in frequency, that would result in a 26% of the

final results. Taking into account that learners were asked to identify the main issue regarding

their English learning process, there was not any other category that obtained more relevance

than this one. Pronunciation as a particular component of the oral skill and fluency as a more

general component of the skill and indispensable for communication. As we know, the ultimate

goal of any language is communication among its users. When focusing on oral communication,

the most relevant aspect to take into account is fluency. Going in depth in the oral skill, I find

pronunciation as an important feature that should not be forgotten at the moment of

teaching/learning the language. Having these ideas in mind, my pedagogical intervention has its

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center of attention on improving students' pronunciation and fluency throughout the explicit use of pronunciation strategies in the EFL class.

During the diagnosis, participants stated they had had little to none instruction on this skill of pronunciation, but at the same time, they expressed their need to communicate in English orally. Learners mentioned their difficulties at the moment of talking to people from anywhere in the world using the foreign language because they did not have the correct pronunciation of many words they wanted to use. This lack of knowledge on this skill limited their confidence when speaking in the target language. Furthermore, and more importantly, participants expressed they did not have enough fluency to communicate in English effectively. Richards (2005) states that fluency is the natural use of language for meaningful communication, meaning that output must be comprehensible when being used naturally. This definition groups the ability a speaker has to use the language with a natural rate of delivery and an accurate production of it.

As a result of this, six workshops were created aiming at empowering learners with strategies to pronounce English language in a better way. They took place online using Zoom ® which is an online platform/App that allows students and instructors to connect lively with audiovisual interaction. This tool also permits teachers to share multimedia content displayed on their screen. In our lessons, I used the Student's Book provided by the company to go step by step covering the necessary points students need to review to accomplish the lesson goal. Besides, there is an Illustration Book with a lot of visual content including pictures, graphics and maps, among others.

Workshop number one was developed with students of level 2 (A1 elementary according to CEFR) during one of our sessions, using the usual material of the class and the Berlitz

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method. It was a communicative class based on oral production as the company demands and features of pronunciation helped learners to improve their oral intelligibility while communicating in English. The goal of this workshop, taking into account Berlitz method, goals should be customized according to the learners in each group and should focus on the language function) was check-in at a hotel and talk to the hotel staff in your next vacation. Some of the key vocabulary that was covered during this lesson included the check in process related concepts such as reservation, front desk, luggage, among others, and hotel staff related words like housekeeping, room service, bellman, and others. Language objectives included to make polite offers with the modal auxiliary *Shall and* to get information politely with indirect questions.

Pronunciation objectives for this first workshop were to link words and reduce unstressed vowels in spoken speech, to identify and produce the sound /ɜː/ and to apply intonation and stress rules in spoken discourse. After greetings and warm up, the class started with the pre-task that consisted of presenting the new vocabulary and structures for learners to understand their meaning and make them practice with them.

These pieces of vocabulary and structure were introduced by the teacher using different presentation techniques. Afterwards, the main task took place; the first part of the task consisted of presenting segmental and supra-segmental features of pronunciation using modeling and students had to drill and then use them in the context of the lesson. The second part involved a role play where students had to simulate a real-life situation where they had to check in at a hotel and speak to hotel staff. They needed to use the vocabulary and pronunciation strategies learned during the unit. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

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Workshop number two was developed with students of level 3 (A2 according to CEFR) and its goal was to check in for a flight in an American airport. Some of the language objectives were to perform the process of checking in for a flight, to choose a seat and to get information about the boarding process. The key vocabulary included actions such as choose, check bags and proceed, and nouns like carry on, baggage, window seat and boarding pass among others. This topic also contained the grammar structure of the future progressive. The pronunciation objectives incorporated linking words, identifying and producing the sounds /æ/ & /dʒ/ and applying stress rules in spoken discourse.

The class started with the pre-task that consisted of presenting the new vocabulary and structures for learners to understand their meaning and make them practice with the new language. These pieces of vocabulary and structure were introduced by the teacher using different presentation techniques. Then, the main task took place; the presentation of pronunciation features took place as well as practice. The second part was the performance activity were learners role played a situation where they had to check in for a flight in an American airport. It was indicated that they needed to use the vocabulary and pronunciation strategies learned during the unit. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

Workshop three was developed with students of level 1 (A1 according to CEFRL) and the goal was to say where you are going and how. Among the language objectives we can find to identify different transportation means, to talk about places we usually visit and to describe how we move around the city. There was a grammar objective that was to use expressions about transportations and places such as go by, get on/off. Pronunciation objectives involved to

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identify and produce the sound /r/, to apply stress rules in words and to link words. Key

vocabulary to be achieved included get around, drive, walk, ride, train, car, airplane, etc.

At the beginning of the class new vocabulary and structures were presented for learners

to understand their meaning and some practical exercises were done. different presentation

techniques were used to introduce the new language. Later, the pronunciation features were

implemented and drilled to make students familiar with them. The second part consisted of a

monologue where students had to apply the new language in a real-life situation where they

shared the way they got around the city. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of

their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

The fourth workshop was developed with students of level 1 (A1 according to CEFRL)

and had as main objective "to ask for your size and make a purchase". Language objectives

included to identify different clothes, to ask about a specific size and to make a purchase.

Furthermore, there was a grammar objective that had to do with using adverbs and adjectives in

the description of clothing items. In addition, there were three pronunciation objectives that were

linking words, identifying and producing the sounds /z/ and /ʃ/, and applying stress rules in

specific expressions. Main lexicon in this workshop included to wear, to try on, to fit, to pay,

shirt, pants, shoes, size, fitting room, cash, and credit card.

The class began with the pre-task where new vocabulary and structures were taught for

learners to understand their meaning. As in the previous workshops, the use of different

presentation techniques was implemented. After that, the main task took place, and the first part

was about presenting segmental and supra-segmental features of pronunciation using modeling.

Different drills were used and participants practiced putting the new knowledge in context. The

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second part was a dialogue where students had to buy/sell clothes, focusing on sizes. It was indicated that they needed to use the vocabulary and pronunciation strategies learned during the unit. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

The fifth workshop was developed with students of level 2 (A1/A2 according to CEFRL) whose goal was to reserve a table at your favorite restaurant to go with your family/friend's next weekend. Some of the language objectives included to talk about different kinds of restaurants, to make a reservation taking into account date, time and number of people, to say what you would like to eat and to talk about your preferences at the moment. Moreover, there was a grammar objective which was to use gerunds. The pronunciation objectives selected for this workshop were to link words, to identify and produce the sound /ŋ/, to apply stress rules in words. Besides, the key vocabulary consisted of verbs such as reserve/book and serve, and nouns such as different kinds of food (seafood, Italian food, steaks, typical food, vegetarian, etc) and table.

The class started with the pre-task that consisted of presenting the new vocabulary and structures. Students needed to understand their meaning and practice with them. These vocabulary and structure were introduced using different presentation techniques such as picture description or finding the synonyms. Then, the main task took place beginning with presenting pronunciation features using modeling and drills for learners to practice and then use them in the context of the lesson. Next, there was a simulated call-in which students needed to make a reservation. It was indicated that they needed to use the vocabulary and pronunciation strategies learned during the unit. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

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The final workshop was developed with students of level 2 (A1+/A2 according to CEFRL) and it had a main goal that was "Say what you use your smartphone for ". It also had a grammar objective in relation to expressing purpose with infinitives and gerunds. Additionally, pronunciation objectives which included applying stress rules, identifying and producing the sound /v/ and link words. Likewise, there were language objectives; for instance, to talk about different uses of appliances and devices and to explain the use of different buttons or icons in a smart device. Finally, there was some key vocabulary to take into consideration such as to use, to turn on/off, to press, to click, to tap appliances (e.g., stove, refrigerator, washing machine, oven), devices (e.g., computer, smart tv, tablet, smart phone), button and icon.

The new vocabulary and structures were introduced, and students practice with them. afterwards, segmental and supra-segmental features of pronunciation were presented through modeling and participants had to drill and then use them in the context of the lesson. To finish the main task, they had to participate in a monologue in which it was necessary to share ideas about the uses they have for their smartphone. The post-task consisted of positive reinforcement of their performance and corrections of their mistakes to finish with a wrap-up of the lesson.

4.3 Action stage

The action stage in this research project took place during several months where the six workshops were applied. The intervention had as its primary goal to teach pronunciation strategies as a way to improve learners' speaking skills at the moment of interacting orally with other speakers of the language. The workshops were focused on the use of pronunciation strategies in real life situations where students had different tasks, role plays, conversations and monologues, to achieve a final

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communicative goal. Those communicative goals included: check in at a hotel, check in for a

flight, say where you are going and how, ask for your size and make a purchase, reserve a table at

your favorite restaurant to go with your family or friends next weekend and say what you use your

smartphone for. Among the pronunciation strategies used in the six workshops there were: linking

words, identifying and producing specific sounds and applying intonation and stress rules. Some

of the workshops were developed during two consecutive classes and some others during a single

class.

The next chart displays the summary of the six workshops with topics, pronunciation strategies

and objectives:

Table 3

Workshops' Structure

W #	Name of workshop	Pronunciation strategies	Learning outcomes
1	**Check in at a hotel.**	To link words, to produce the sound /ɜ:/ and o apply intonation and stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a role play where they need to check in at a hotel and speak to hotel staff.
2	**Check in for a flight.**	To link words, to produce the sounds /æ/ & /dʒ/ and to apply stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a conversation where they need to check in for a flight at an American airport.
3	**Say where you are going and how.**	To link words, to identify and produce the sound /r/ and to apply stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a monologue where they need to share ideas about how they get around the city.
4	**Ask for your size and make a purchase.**	To link words, to produce the sounds /z/ and /ʃ/ and to apply stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a role play where they need to ask for their size when purchasing clothes.

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| 5	**Reserve a table at your favorite restaurant to go with your family or friends, next weekend.**	To link words, to identify and produce the sound /ŋ/ and to apply stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a phone conversation where they need to reserve a table to go with their friend or family on the following weekend.
6	**Say what you use your smartphone for.**	To link words, to identify and produce the sound /v/ and to apply stress rules.	Students will be able to use pronunciation strategies in a monologue where they need to share ideas about the use they have for their smartphones.

4.4 *Evaluation* stage

Workshop 1: Check in at a hotel and speak to hotel staff in your next vacation.

This first workshop took place in two consecutive days. The lesson was conducted as planned: Establishing a communicative goal and presenting vocabulary and expressions necessary to do a check-in at a hotel and talk to hotel staff. Furthermore, doing a short grammar explanation and practice about the use of shall, and finally presenting pronunciation items to be discussed. The pronunciation strategies chosen for this workshop included linking words, a special vowel sound (/ɜ:/), and used in the performance task that consisted of a role play about a checking-in situation and having conversations with hotel staff.

Results of coding process to the instruments applied in the implementation of workshop 1 (surveys to learners, a non-participant observation and teacher journal) are presented below:

Graph 1

Data Triangulation in Workshop 1

Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation
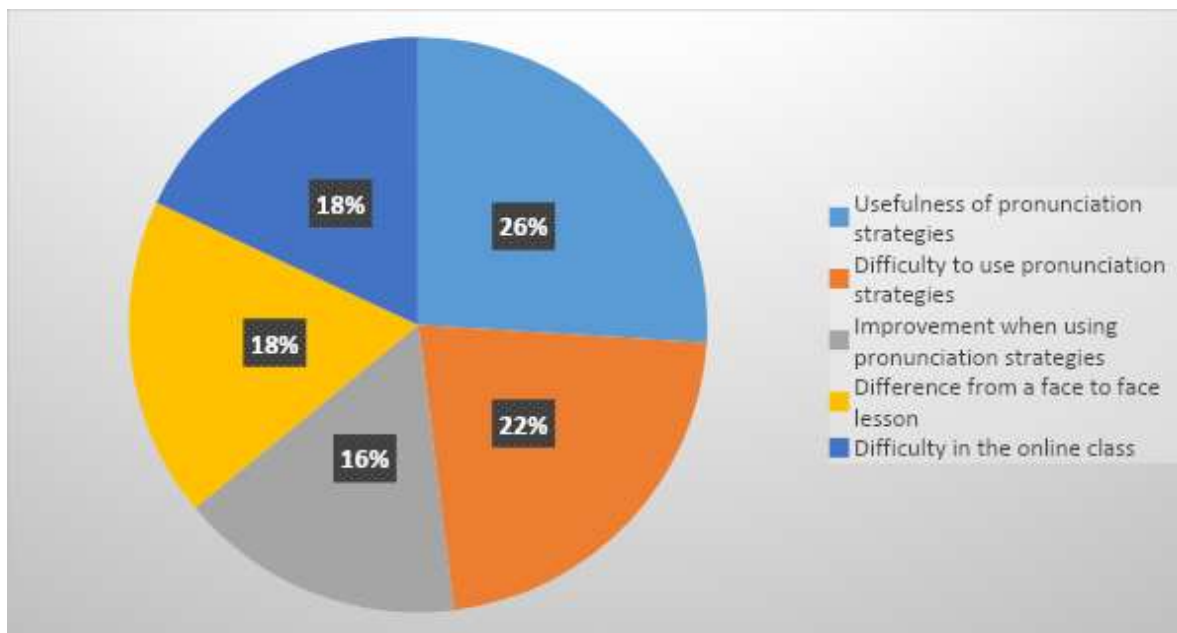
To start this analysis of the first workshop displayed in the graphic, I would like to focus my

attention on participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies as it has the

highest frequency (26%). This clearly shows students found pronunciation greatly important for

their learning process and most of them thought teaching pronunciation strategies in the EFL

class is so useful as they mentioned in the survey. Although this is something learners were not

accustomed to, found in a student's survey, and they had several difficulties to accurately

produce some of the proposed items, they were thankful about including this topic in the class.

Some learners showed to be particularly surprised with the pronunciation strategies taught. For

example, they had not heard about the sound /ɜː/ and it caused great interest to know that the

word "first" was pronounced with that sound. Another example was the linking words strategy as

they did not know that such tactic was used in English. Various comments I could gather on the

surveys pointed out the following:

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"*If I have good pronunciation, my communication is better. The people can understand me. That is my problem many times, I don't know to pronounce the words, and other people don't understand me*" (SS W1)

"*Pronunciation is very, very important for communication because some people don't speak good and it's very difficult to understand. That's the reason that I like the teachers to correct my bad pronunciation*" (SS W1)

On the comments of the non-participant observation there also was a clear tendency to consider this strategy as very valid and useful on the class; the observer wrote:

"*I find that those strategies were appropriate to improve learners' communication while they used pronunciation strategies at the same time*" (NPO Workshop 1)

Likewise, there was a comment in my teacher journal on this subject matter; I wrote:

"*Participants made an accurate use of the strategies such as the use of sound /ɜː/ in "first", the use of stress patterns in "concierge or room service" and linking words in "a piece of luggage" showing improvement in their intelligibility. There was only one mistake from a student who did not use the stress correctly in "housekeeping". (JOU. W1)*

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the difficulty learners had to (accurately) implement pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop. With a 22% of frequency, this item becomes the second most popular among respondents showing a clear tendency about the perception they have on the difficulty of English pronunciation which means that this problem remains. Students and teacher observer agreed on the idea of facing a hard time when putting into practice pronunciation strategies. During my analysis of this workshop, I noticed some learners had issues pronouncing words together (e.g. a piece of luggage). Most of

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them had not had the opportunity of using this strategy of linking words, and therefore learned about it for the first time during the workshop. Consequently, a lot of drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. Moreover, there was an issue related to fossilization of some words (e.g. first /fɜːrst/ was pronounced /fiːrst/ by a couple of students); thus, in several occasions learners were accustomed to pronounce a word in certain way (incorrect) and it was difficult to change their minds and interiorize the new (correct) pronunciation; some examples are listed below:

"The lobby is on the <u>first</u> floor" (correct pronunciation /fɜːrst /) was pronounced /fiːrst/ making a clear change on the first vowel sound

"a piece of luggage" (correct pronunciation /əpisəv ˈlʌgɪʤ/) was pronounced / /ə pis əv ˈlʌgɪʤ/ showing difficulty on joining words.

There is a special category dealing with the virtual methodology of the class that needs to be taken into account. 18% of the data in the triangulation shows that connection problems were a key issue related to intelligibility. During this workshop implementation the learners and I had some trouble in terms of communication due to connection stability, interference, echoes and cuts, among others. In consequence, this factor sometimes makes it difficult to accurately measure classmates' intelligibility in the case of students, or learners' ability in the case of the teacher observer and me. Learners have stated this issue to be a matter of concern because it affects their level of comprehension, and thus, communication as expressed in the following comment:

"Sometimes there was a small problem in the communication but yes, it's easy". (SS W1)

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"Well, I like the face-to-face class more because we can understand the other students. The communication is clearer. Sometimes, the connection is cut and it is very difficult to understand the other person. So, in the classroom this does not happen ". (SS W1)

On the other hand, we can find the opposite idea concerning the easiness to work in this subject matter on the online platform. The data shows that in many cases participants do not have connection problems and have a smooth communication. When there is no interference of any kind, students can have a very similar level of comprehension as if they were in the classroom in a face-to-face lesson. Moreover, they expressed that the platform used for the classes is very user friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible; for instance, the ability to mute all microphones except one when the teacher wants one person to be the focus of attention.

Furthermore, there is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants can notice on their and their classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies seen. It was very common on the students' survey, the non-participant observation and my journal that learners improved somewhat their intelligibility. with a frequency of 16%, this category plays and important role in the final results of the workshop. When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all agreed there was an increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. An example of this perception can be found in one of the learners' answers to the question on the existence of improvement:

"Yes, very much. We use the same pronunciation so it is easier to understand if we use it like a standard". (SS W1)

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"Yes, at first, the learners use long pauses to say sentences like (a piece of luggage), nevertheless, the teacher made that difficulty an opportunity to practice linking sentences by modeling the pronunciation of the short fragment (a piece of), after these teachers' interventions, the learners developed confidence and seemed to improved their pronunciation skills in those type of sentences." (NPO W1)

The final item to be analyzed has to do with the differences that the learners perceived between an online class and a face-to-face lesson. An 18% of the data analysis corresponded to the participants' identification of clear variations talking about the two ways of taking the class. There was a very thought-provoking opinion on the non-participant observation regarding this topic that said "in a face-to-face lesson, the learners would have more opportunities to interact among themselves and eventually express more ideas to their colleagues" (NPO, W1), this confirms their belief that in a regular face-to-face class while teachers or classmates are talking, learners can also talk in low volume (express their ideas and practice. On the contrary, in the online classroom, learners cannot talk to each other while other people are speaking since that would cause interference.

**Workshop 2: Checking in at an American airport**

This second workshop was developed during two lessons. The first step was to establish a communicative goal and then I presented vocabulary and expressions necessary to do a check-in at an American airport. Furthermore, doing a short grammar practice about the use of future progressive, and finally presenting pronunciation items to be discussed. The pronunciation strategies chosen for this workshop included linking words, a special vowel sound (/æ/) and a consonant sound (/ʤ/), and applying the correct stress to certain words.

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The implementation of workshop two resulted in the data displayed in graph 2 below.

Graph 2

Data Triangulation in Workshop 2
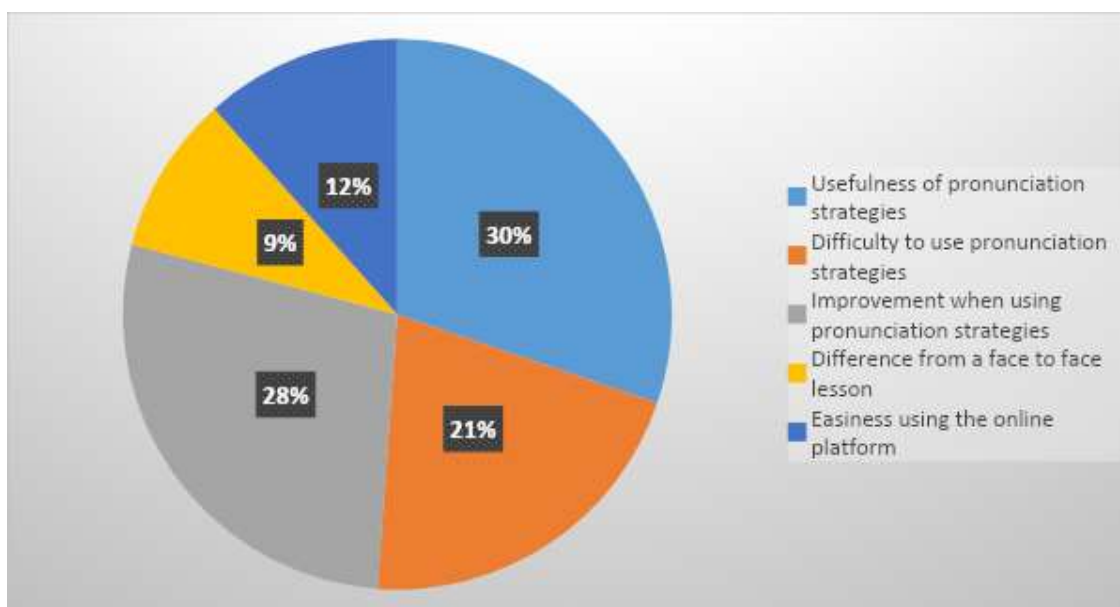
Graphic 2 shows five categories resulting from the three instruments I applied. To start the

analysis of this second workshop, I would like to focus on participants' perception on the

usefulness of pronunciation strategies as it continued to report the highest frequency (30%). This

clearly shows students, the non-participant observer and the teacher-researcher found

pronunciation greatly important for the English learning process and most of them thought

teaching pronunciation strategies in the EFL class is so useful as they mentioned in the survey.

Students were thankful about including this topic in the class. Some learners showed to be

particularly surprised with the pronunciation strategies taught; e.g. they had not heard about the

sound / æ / and it caused great interest to know that words like "baggage" were pronounced with

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that sound. Another example was the linking words strategy as they did not know that such tactic was used in English. Various comments I could gather on the surveys pointed out the following:

"I think it is important, because I will speak the language more fluently and people will understand me better." (SS W2)

"I think these strategies helped me to improve the pronunciation to make it more native than other courses that teach English" (SS W2)

On the comments of the non-participant observation there also was a clear tendency to consider this strategy as very valid and useful in the class; the observer wrote:

"Pronunciation strategies are very relevant and useful in the teaching and learning process to master the English language. It is important to make students aware of pronouncing words in the proper way in order to get fluency and communication." (NPO W2)

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the level of difficulty learners had to implement pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop accurately. With a 21% of frequency, this item becomes the third most popular among respondents showing a clear tendency about the perception they had on the level of difficulty of the strategies practiced. Unlike the first workshop, learners and teacher-observer agreed on the idea that the pronunciation strategies used in this lesson were not hard to implement. During my analysis of this workshop through the journal, I noticed that most of the time participants had no issues pronouncing words or expressions using the vowel or consonant sounds introduced, neither using the correct stress patterns, nor linking words. Most of them had not had the opportunity of using this strategy, and therefore learned about it for the first time during the workshop; in fact, not so much drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. In the students' surveys,

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when learners were asked about the level of difficulty where 1 was very difficult and 5 was very easy, most of them answered 5. In the non-participant observation, there was also a comment on that subject matter:

"The teacher explained the correct way to pronounce the words and take it to a real situation for students to practice. So, it was not challenging at all for students to get the proper pronunciation of the words." (NPO Workshop 2)

This opinion supports the idea students had about the easiness to perform the pronunciation strategies in an accurate way.

In the third category there is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants could notice on their and their classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies seen. It was very common on the students' survey, the non-participant observation and my journal that learners improved somewhat their intelligibility. with a frequency of 28%; this category plays an important role in the final results of this workshop as the second highest frequency. When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all agreed there was an increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. An example of this perception can be found on learners' and non-participant observer's answers to the question on the existence of improvement:

"We understand better and communication is better". (SS W2)

"When you explained to us how to do it [pronunciation], we did it, Our pronunciation was better". (SS W2)

"Of course, I saw the difference in the pronunciation, the velocity and the accent, it's more pure." (SS W2)

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"It is evident that students had made positive progress as the pronunciation class was developed. They were able to get fluency, accuracy and they linked words". (NPO W2)

"Taking into account the explanation given by the teacher about pronunciation strategies, I noticed that participants' utterances were more intelligible and they really enjoyed knowing that pronunciation is relevant for them". (NPO W2)

The next category I want to talk about deals with the virtual methodology of the class. 12% of the data in the triangulation shows that taking the class using the virtual environment was simple and allowed learners to understand the whole lesson easily. In contrast to workshop 1, during this lesson there were minor connection issues that did not interfere in the correct development of the class. All learners answered that it was easy to understand the workshop using the online video conference platform. Besides, the observer commented:

"Based on the two videos, I can say that it was easy to understand the workshop because I saw real context conversation using pronunciation skills" (NPO W2)

The final category to be analyzed has to do with the perception participants had about the difference between an online class and a face-to-face class. This item had the lowest frequency with a 9% and shows some perceptions they had towards virtual education. They expressed the platform used for the classes is very user friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible. In fact, some students prefer online classes as was evident in some comments gathered in the students' surveys:

"I think that zoom is better than face-to-face, you pay more attention to the students and we to you, in addition to that it is easier to attend classes no matter where you are". (SS W2)

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"Differ in the confidence that we make, it is more simple and easier to express and make mistakes without the fear of being judged. In face-to- face environments we felt intimidated by the teacher or his knowledge, and it is difficult to express any question". (SS W2)

I made a comment on this issue as well in my journal:

"When there is not interference of any kind, students can have a very similar level of comprehension as if they were in the classroom in a face-to-face lesson" (JOURNAL)

Moreover, the non-participant observer made some emphasis on the issue of having to work using ICT nowadays which is something mandatory:

"We are facing a difficult situation in which we were forced to use ICT in our online classes. It is important to have face-to-face conversation with students to practice different skills but using the proper techniques we can practice and teach students pronunciation strategies to improve their learning process". (NPO W2)

Based on the results, this second workshop confirmed the need students have to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better orally. They consider this aspect very useful and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it has concerning their and their classmates' oral production. With the pass of time, people get more and more accustomed to have virtual education and some learners even prefer this method as it was shown in the results of the triangulation analysis.

Workshop 3: Say where you are going and how

This third workshop took place in one complete session. The class started with the establishment of a communicative goal. Moreover, vocabulary and expressions necessary to a say where students are going and how were presented; after that, presenting pronunciation features that

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were going to be explored. The pronunciation strategies chosen for this workshop included

linking words (e.g., get on / get off), a special consonant sound (/r/), and applying the correct

stress to certain words (vacation, bicycle).

Triangulation process on the instruments applied in the implementation of workshop 3

are shown in the graphic below:

Graph 3

Data Triangulation in Workshop 3
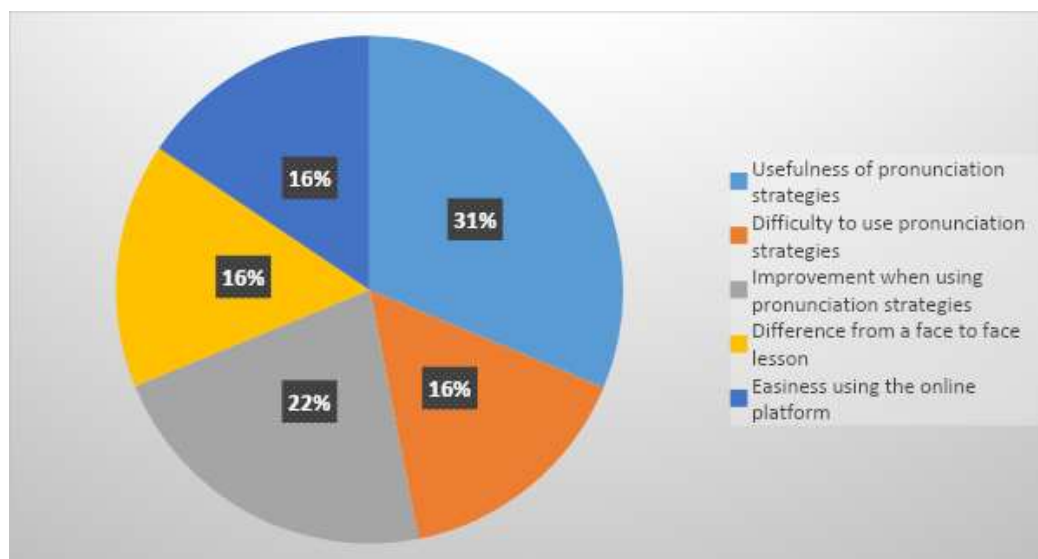
Graphic 3 shows five categories resulting from the three instruments applied. To start the

analysis of this third workshop, I would like to focus on participants' perception on the

usefulness of pronunciation strategies as it continued to report the highest frequency (31%). This

clearly shows students, the non-participant observer and the teacher-researcher found

pronunciation greatly important for the English learning process and most of them expressed

teaching pronunciation strategies in the EFL class is useful in the process. Students were

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thankful about including this topic in the class. Some learners showed to be particularly surprised with the pronunciation strategies taught; e.g. they had no idea the correct pronunciation of the word vacation was actually /veɪˈkeɪʃən/. Another example was the linking words strategy as they did not know that such technique was used in English. Some comments I could gather on the surveys pointed out the following:

"I think it is important, because I will speak the language more fluently and people will understand me better." (SS W2)

"The correct use of pronunciation strategies makes a conversation more fluid. To be able to efficiently communicate an idea, it is essential to make a correct intonation and pronunciation of the words." (SS W3)

On the comments of the non-participant observation there also was a clear tendency to consider this strategy as very valid and useful in the class; the observer wrote:

"Yes, the strategies were useful. The teacher used elicitation techniques such as repetition with the support of visual aids, sentence starters, and useful expression and encouraged the students to repeat long sentences by including first, second and third person in those sentences. The teacher made sure to use the vocabulary in context, the students seemed to understand and all of them engaged in the class conversation." (NPO W3)

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the level of difficulty learners had to implement pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop accurately. With a 21% of frequency, this item shows a clear tendency about the perception they had on the level of difficulty of the strategies practiced. During my analysis of this workshop through the JOU W3, I noticed that most of the time participants had no issues pronouncing words or expressions using

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the consonant sound introduced, using the correct stress patterns, or linking words. Most of them had not had the opportunity of using these kind of strategies, and therefore learned about it for the first time during the workshop; in fact, not so much drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. In the students' surveys, when learners were asked about the level of difficulty where 1 was very difficult and 5 was very easy, most of them answered 4-5. In the non-participant observation, there was also a comment on that subject matter:

"The pronunciation strategies were challenging to some extent, especially at the beginning of the class, because they took some minutes to get familiar with the vocabulary and useful expressions regarding means of transportation and places around the city. Nevertheless, as the class advanced, the learners seemed to feel more comfortable with the content and key expressions. This was possible due to the varied pronunciation strategies suggested by the teacher." (NPO Workshop 3)

According to the observer, the level of difficulty started to decrease as the lesson went on and learners had the opportunity to drill and practice with the concepts.

In the third category there is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants could notice on their and their classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies seen in the workshop. It was very common to see on the students' survey, the non-participant observation and my journal that learners improved somewhat their intelligibility. with a frequency of 22%, this category plays an important role in the final results of this workshop. When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all agreed there was an increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. Some example of this perception can be found on learners' and non-participant observer's answers to the question on the achievement of some improvement:

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"Yes, I noticed improvement in my speech when using pronunciation strategies, mainly when making sounds and making a correct pronunciation, correcting common mistakes that I thought were correct". (SS W3)

"Yes, because you can talk with more confidence about your pronunciation, for example with the use of the stress patterns in some words." (SS W3)

"In this class, the teacher demonstrated that using varied repetition techniques including visual aids, content in context, sentence starters and different subject pronouns for the same sentences help students say long sentences and connect ideas while they develop phonemic awareness. Although some mistakes come during the process, the learners can be encouraged to self-correct and demonstrate appropriate fluency according to their level without interfering with comprehensibility". (NPO W3)

"The students were able to develop decoding and phonemic awareness because they identified words by using spelling, sound, meaning, and context clues; they were also able to use the correct stress for the studied items. In this class, the sounds of (i) (r) (o) in different words were emphasized and practiced by students. Eg: bike, drive, foot etc". (NPO W3)

There was something I highlighted in my analysis as well:

"Learners were able to successfully perform the /r/ sound and the linking words strategy and used them throughout the lesson without much hesitation" (JOU W3)

The next category deals with the virtual methodology of the class that needs to be taken into account; 16% of the data in the triangulation shows that taking the class using the virtual environment was simple and allowed learners to understand the whole lesson easily. There were no major connection issues of any type during this lesson. All learners answered that it was easy

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to understand the workshop using the online video conference platform. Besides, the observer commented:

"Yes, the teacher used the resources efficiently by using scaffolding techniques such as: presenting visual aids in a timely manner, using sentence starters and visual aids to promote interaction with the input and using gestures and elicitation techniques to facilitate comprehensible input." (NPO W3)

The final category to be analyzed has to do with the perception participants had about the difference between an online class and a face-to-face class involving pronunciation strategies; with a 16% of frequency this category shows some perceptions they had towards virtual education: They expressed the platform used for the classes is very user-friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible when working with pronunciation tasks. In fact, one student's testimony illustrates the participants' preference for online classes as was evident in the comment gathered in the students' surveys:

"Maybe it would differ only in the place and the time, because it is very easy and comfortable with a platform like Zoom , you save a lot of time in this way". (SS W3)

Two students noticed minor differences between the two ways of studying an English class that involves pronunciation techniques:

"Face to face lessons maybe can be more interactive, more participation". (SS W3)

"Only in the form of interaction between classmates and teachers". (SS W3)

Moreover, the non-participant observer made this comment:

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"In an in-person class, the teacher might use handouts and pieces of papers to practice word relatives and help students do more exercises in pairs or small groups when all students attend class. However, taking into account that this class only had a few students, the activities and resources were effective to promote communication and class participation". (NPO W3)

In summary, this third workshop confirmed the need students had to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better in an oral way. They considered this aspect very useful and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it had concerning their and their classmates' oral production

**Workshop 4: Asking for your size and making a purchase.**

This fourth workshop was conducted as planned, setting a communicative goal and presenting vocabulary and expressions necessary to "asking for your size and making a purchase" to start; then, presenting the pronunciation items to be subject of study. The pronunciation strategies chosen for this workshop included linking words (e.g., try it on / I'll take it), two special consonant sounds (/z/ & /ʃ/), and applying the correct stress to certain expressions (fitting room, credit card).

Results of the triangulation of the three instruments applied in the implementation of workshop 4 are displayed in the following graphic:

Graph 4

Data Triangulation in Workshop 4

Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation
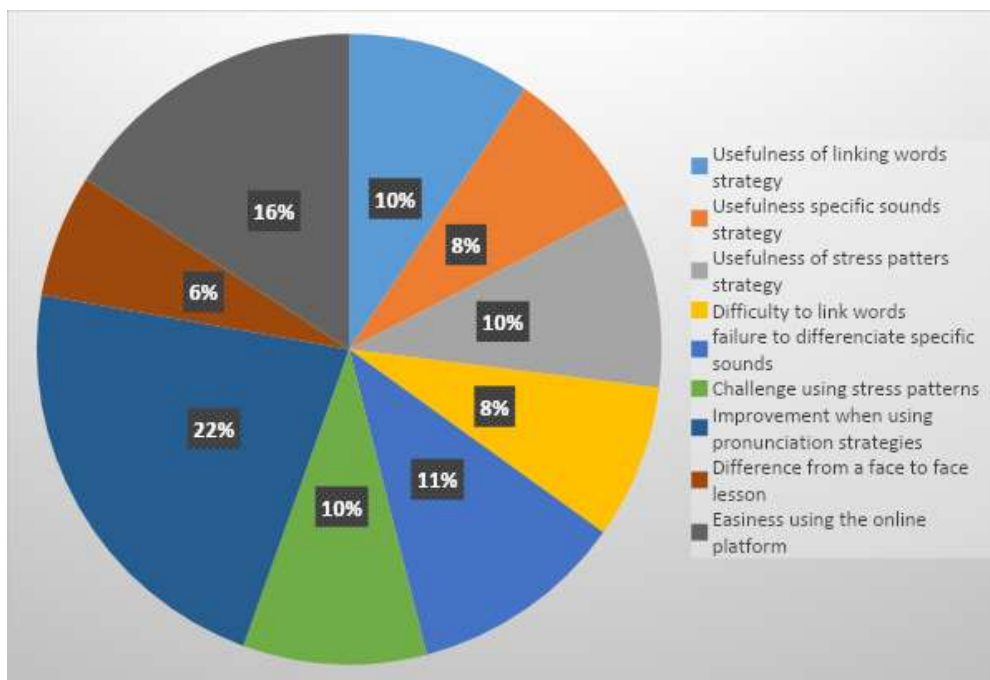
The graphic shows nine categories resulting from the three instruments applied. To start

the analysis of this fourth workshop, I would like to focus on participants' perception on the

usefulness of pronunciation strategies, specifically linking words, which has a frequency of 9%.

This code shows that students, the non-participant observer and the teacher-researcher found

pronunciation important for the English learning process and most of them expressed teaching

this pronunciation strategy in the EFL class is useful in the process. Students were thankful about

including this topic in the class. Some learners showed to be very interested with the linking

words strategy taught; e.g. they had no idea the correct pronunciation of the expressions "try it

on" or "I'll take it" should be linked. Some comments I could gather on the surveys pointed out

the following:

   *"I think these strategies are very useful because you can talk with fluency and with

confidence."* (SS W4)

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On the comments of the non-participant observation there was also a tendency to consider this strategy as very valid and useful in the class; the observer wrote:

"Through the lesson, students practiced real context situations in which they could get fluency while pronouncing the words and expressions given in the class." (NPO W4)

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, in this case related to the accurate use of the specific sounds /z/ & /ʃ/. With an 8% of frequency, this item shows a tendency about the perception they had on the usefulness of the practiced items. During my analysis of this workshop through the JOU W4, I noticed that most of the time participants did not know that the "z" sound had a special pronunciation in English different from the "s" sound they are accustomed to pronounce in Spanish. Likewise, they did not know that the sound generated by the combination "sh" was in fact partially different from that produced in the combination "ch". On the Ss survey W4 when they were asked about the usefulness of this pronunciation strategy, they all marked it as "very useful".

In the third category there was the participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, particularly stress patterns. This category has a 10% of frequency being the highest in terms of usefulness. Among my comments on the JOU W4, I identified learners were surprised when realizing that if you put the stress in a specific position the pronunciation changes totally; consequently, they understood the importance of it and they all rated it with the highest score "very useful" (Ss survey W4). In the non-participant observation, there was also a comment on that subject matter:

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"Students were able to improve their speaking skills taking into account: accuracy, fluency, stress patterns and linking words." (NPO Workshop 4)

The next three codes have to do with the level of difficulty learners had to implement pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop. Starting with linking words with an 8% of frequency, this aspect showed very low challenge for participants who had no issues pronouncing expressions linked. Just a couple of drills using the sentences for repetition were needed for students to perform an acceptable utterance (JOU W4). Taking into account SS SURVEY W4, every learner rated linking words as "very easy", which supports my previous idea.

After that, I have the perception about the difficulty of specific sounds, in this case the use of /z/ and /ʃ/ sounds. Most of the learners had not had the opportunity of using these kinds of sounds, and therefore learned about them for the first time during the workshop. In fact, much drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. In the students' surveys, when learners were asked about the level of difficulty where 1 was very difficult and 5 was very easy, most of them answered 3. This evidently implies a difference with the other strategies taught until this moment where the average of rating was between four and five. The teacher-observer agrees with this perspective as well, according to his comment on this subject:

"The use of /z/ & /ʃ/ sounds were a little bit difficult to pronounce at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher showed some examples, and the students were able to practice and get the correct pronunciation." (NPO W4)

The next category has to do with the difficulty of stress patterns. Although it was new to students, they had little challenge to perform this strategy correctly. Besides, they rated it as

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"very easy" (SS SURVEY W4). During my analysis of this item, I found that participants tend to pronounce the expressions in a correct way on their first try (when they are asked on how they think it is done before teaching the actual form) JOU W4. The observer also commented on this issue:

"Students were able to improve their speaking skills taking into account: accuracy, fluency, stress patterns and linking words." (NPO Workshop 4)

The following aspect to consider is "improvement when using pronunciation strategies". There is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants could notice on their and their classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies seen in the workshop. It was very common to see on the students' survey, the non-participant observation and my journal that learners improved somewhat their intelligibility. with a frequency of 22%; this category plays an important role in the final results of this workshop as the highest frequency. When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all agreed there was an increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. Some examples of this perception can be found on learners' and non-participant observer's answers to the question on the achievement of some improvement:

"Yes, because you can talk with more confidence about your pronunciation, for example with the use of the stress patterns in some words." (SS W4).

"Yes, I noticed improvements in my speech and in that of my classmates, especially when we pronounced the "z" and the "sh". (SS W4)

"At the end of the lesson, the students were able to interact with the teacher and practiced a real context situation related to buying clothes." (NPO W4)

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The next category is the virtual methodology of the class that needs to be taken into account; 16% of the data in the triangulation shows that taking the class using the virtual environment was simple and allowed learners to understand the whole lesson easily. There were no major connection issues of any type during this lesson; consequently, communication was effective and allowed students to get the whole idea of the class (JOU W4). All learners answered that it was easy to understand the workshop using the online video conference platform (SS W4). Besides, the observer commented:

"The online conference was friendly to students because they were able to understand all the aspects given by the teacher related to pronunciation strategies." (NPO W4).

The final category to be analyzed has to do with the perception participants had about the difference between an online class and a face-to-face class involving pronunciation strategies. With a 6% of frequency this category has the lowest frequency and shows some perceptions they had towards virtual education: They expressed the platform used for the classes is very user-friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible when working with pronunciation tasks. On the students' survey one participant commented:

"The only difference is personal interaction". (SS W4)

Moreover, the non-participant observer made this comment:

"Face to face and online lessons, in both courses it is evident that there is interaction and the methodological objectives proposed by the teacher can be achieved in order to learn a second language". (NPO W4)

In summary, this fourth workshop reaffirmed the need students had to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better in an oral way. They considered it a very useful

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aspect and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it had concerning their and their

classmates' oral production. Among the strategies applied in this case, one showed to be

particularly more difficult than the other in this lesson or previous workshops.

Workshop 5: Reserve a table at your favorite restaurant to go with your family/friends on the weekend.

The fifth started with the presentation of vocabulary and expressions necessary to "Reserve a

table at your favorite restaurant to go with your family/friends on the weekend" as well as stating

a communicative goal; next, presenting pronunciation items to be studied. The pronunciation

strategies chosen for this workshop included linking words (e.g., book a table / I feel like

having), one special consonant sound (/ŋ/), and applying the correct stress to certain expressions

(e.g., seafood, vegetarian).

In graph 5 below, there can be observed the triangulation results:

Graph 5

Data Triangulation in Workshop 5
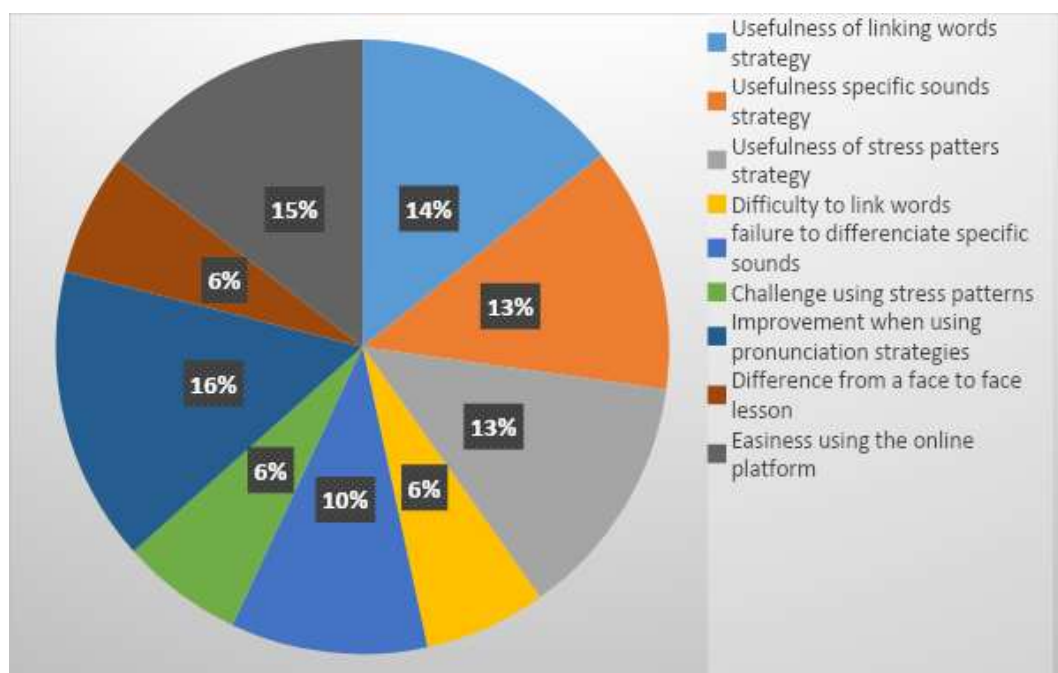
Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation

The graphic shows nine categories resulting from the three instruments applied. To begin the analysis of this fifth workshop, I would like to focus on participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, specifically linking words, which has a frequency of 14%. This code shows students, the non-participant observer and the teacher-researcher found pronunciation important for the English learning process and most of them expressed teaching this pronunciation strategy in the EFL class is useful in the learning process. Some learners showed to be very interested with the linking words strategy taught when we practiced "I feel like having" or "book a table". During my reflection upon this workshop I wrote in my journal: "learners looked surprised and even amazed when they realized the expressions practiced in class could be pronounced linked" (JOU W5). Some comments I could gather on the surveys pointed out the following: "I believe that now in a conversation I can easily understand what is being said to me." (SS W5). This opinion shows the student not only sees pronunciation strategies as a way to improve intelligibility but also their oral comprehension of English. From the comments of the non-participant observer, I extracted the following comment to the item: "Yes, they are, because when the students are able to pronounce words correctly, they will be able to express words and ideas without interfering with comprehensibility." (NPO W5). This idea reinforces the argument about good pronunciation directly and positively affecting communication.

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, in this case related to the accurate use of the specific sound /ŋ/. With an 13% of frequency, this item shows a tendency about the perception they had on the usefulness of the practiced items. During my analysis of this workshop through the JOU W5, I noticed that participants did not have any idea about the existence of this specific sound. Therefore, students struggled a little bit during the presentation of this sound and could not

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notice the difference between this and just the n sound and g sound separated. Afterwards, when

they practiced the pronunciation a couple of times, they could identify a little difference and

perform correctly. On the Ss survey W5 when they were asked about the usefulness of this

pronunciation strategy, they all marked it as "very useful" which means that they identify the

importance of this aspect at the moment of speaking in the target language

In the third category I analyze participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation

strategies, particularly stress patterns. This category has a 13% of frequency which is similar to

previous two categories and completes a 40% among the three showing that everyone

participating in this workshop gives high relevance to the items taught. Among my comments on

the JOU W5, I noticed that this pronunciation strategy is not something learners are accustomed

to taking into account at the moment of speaking English and thus, it can cause a lot of trouble

for them to communicate efficiently. All students rated it with the highest score "very useful" (Ss

survey W4). In the non-participant observation, there was also a comment on that subject matter:

"The teacher makes sure to have the students repeat mispronounced words, He emphasizes on

word stress" (NPO Workshop 5) which is also evidence of the effectiveness of the pronunciation

strategy.

The next three codes have to do with the level of difficulty learners had to implement

pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop. Starting with linking words with a 7% of

frequency, this aspect showed very low challenge for participants who had no issues

pronouncing expressions linked. Using only two or three drills using the sentences for repetition

were needed for students to perform adequately (JOU W5). Taking into account Ss Survey W5,

every learner rated linking words as "very easy", which supports my previous idea. There were

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no comments in the non-participant observation about this topic which also supports the previous

statement.

After that, there was the item of perception about the difficulty of specific sounds, in this

case the use of the /ŋ/ sound. Most of the learners had not had the opportunity of practicing this

sound before, and therefore learned about it for the first time during the workshop. In fact, more

drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. However, in the students'

surveys, when learners were asked about the level of difficulty where 1 was very difficult and 5

was very easy, most of them answered 5. This evidently implies that after some practice, learners

consider it easy to accurately perform it. The teacher-observer agrees with me in the idea of

learners having some difficulty pronouncing the /ŋ/ sound specially at the beginning, according

to his comment: "Yes, the //ŋ/ sound was challenging for the students at first, but after repetition

strategies and rehearsal, the students were able to pronounce words correctly." (NPO W5)

The next category has to do with the difficulty of stress patterns and although it was new

to students, they had little challenge to perform this strategy correctly. Besides, they all rated it

as "very easy" (SS SURVEY W5). During my analysis of this item, I found participants are not

used to paying attention to this (JOU W5).

The following aspect to consider is "improvement when using pronunciation strategies".

There is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants could notice on their and their

classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies covered throughout

the workshop. It was evident on the students' survey, the non-participant observation and my

journal that learners improved somewhat their intelligibility. With a frequency of 16%, this

category plays an important role in the final results of this workshop as the highest frequency.

When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all agreed there was an

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increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. Some examples of this perception

can be found on learners' and non-participant observer's answers to the question on the

achievement of some improvement:

"Yes, I do. The sound is like native people and is easier to pronounce." (SS W5).

"Yes, in that we have better pronunciation and more fluency" (SS W5)

"Yes, the students were able to overcome difficulties when pronouncing the //ŋ/ sound

when they pronounced words such as eating, having, making, etc. They also had the opportunity

to practice the (a) sound when they pronounce words like vegetarian." (NPO W5)

The next category is the virtual methodology of the class that needs to be considered;

15% of the data in the triangulation shows that taking the class using the virtual environment was

simple and allowed learners to understand the whole lesson easily. There were no major

connection issues of any type during this lesson; consequently, communication was effective and

allowed students to get the whole idea of the class (JOU W5). All learners answered that it was

easy to understand the workshop using the online video conference platform (SS W5). Besides,

the observer made an emphasis on the advantage this platform provides to share multimedia

content of different kinds. He commented the following when asked if he considered the

platform as a useful tool to deliver the class:

"Yes, it was, the teacher used tools such as google docs, plenty of visual aids, sentence

starters to scaffold instruction. When students ask questions about vocabulary that is not

included in the content, he also finds images online to provide them with more options to

understand the content and expand their knowledge." (NPO W5).

The final category to be analyzed has to do with the perception participants had about the

difference between an online class and a face-to-face class involving pronunciation strategies.

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With a 6% of frequency this category has the lowest frequency and shows some perceptions learners had towards virtual education: They expressed the platform used for the classes was very user-friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible when working with pronunciation tasks. They pointed out that this type of lesson helps them save time and energy as they can connect on time wherever they are. On the students' survey I could gather some interesting comments:

"For me the difference is that I can connect on time. Then, I'm not in a hurry. I can concentrate more." (SS W5)

"I think it could be just a little more interactive" (SS W5)

Moreover, the non-participant observer made this comment:

"In an online class, the students would have the chance to interact in pairs or in groups of three simultaneously, so the teacher would become a facilitator who moves around the classroom providing feedback and modeling." (NPO W5)

On the other hand, one student commented that the disadvantage of online classes has to do with the possibility to see the articulation clearly and to listen to the correct pronunciation in a transparent way. This person said:

"It can be in the sounds being heard differently and in seeing better the correct way to move the mouth to pronounce" (SS W5)

In summary, this fifth workshop reaffirmed the need students had to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better when speaking. They considered this aspect very useful and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it had concerning their and their

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classmates' oral production. Among the strategies applied in this case, one showed to be

particularly more difficult than the others which was the sound /ŋ/. Learners did not know this

sound and had to practice with it several times.

Workshop 6: Say what you use your smartphone for.

This last workshop was conducted as planned: I established a communicative goal. Furthermore,

I presented vocabulary and expressions in ration to "say what you use your smartphone for".

Afterwards, pronunciation features were introduced. The pronunciation strategies chosen for this

workshop included linking words (e.g. washing machine / turn on), one special consonant sound

(/v/) as in "oven" or "stove", and applying the correct stress to certain expressions (e.g.

smartphone, refrigerator).

Graph 6 presents the results of the coding process for the three instruments administered.

Graph 6

Data Triangulation in Workshop 6
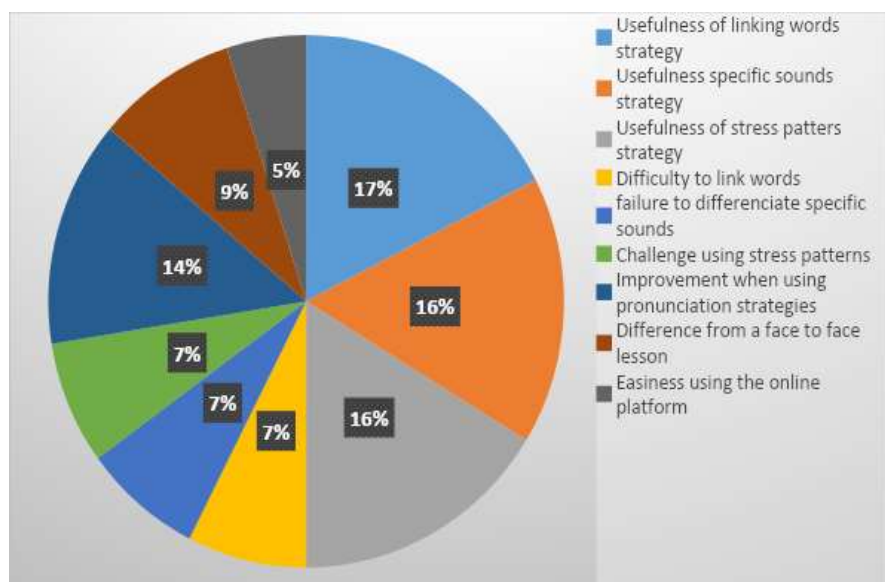
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The graphic shows nine categories resulting from the three instruments applied. To start analyzing workshop six, I would like to focus on participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, particularly linking words, which has a frequency of 17%. This code shows students, the non-participant observer and the teacher-researcher, who found this pronunciation strategy is important for the English learning process and most of them expressed that teaching this in the EFL class is useful in the learning process. Some learners showed to be very interested with the linking words strategy taught when we practiced "washing machine" or "turn on/off". Some comments I could gather on the surveys pointed out the following: "I think that the strategies are very important in my process because I can use them every day in my job or practice in my home with my wife" or "I can do better and progress in my learning and the way to communicate with other people." (SS W6). This opinion shows the student not only sees pronunciation strategies as a way to improve intelligibility but also oral communication of English with other people. During my reflection upon this workshop, I wrote in my journal: "Students realized this strategy can be a great booster to their oral fluency and communication in the target language" (JOU W6).

The second category to be analyzed has to do with the participants' perception on the usefulness of pronunciation strategies, in this case related to the accurate use of the specific sound /v/. With a 16% of frequency, this item shows a tendency about the perception they had on the usefulness of the practiced items. During my analysis of this workshop through the JOU W6, I noticed that participants had had some instruction and had some idea about the item that was subject matter. Therefore, students did not have trouble during the presentation of this sound and could notice the difference between /v/ and /b/ sounds easily. On the Ss survey W6 when they were asked about the usefulness of this pronunciation strategy, they all marked it as "very

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useful" which means that they identify the importance of this aspect at the moment of speaking

in the target language

In the third category, I want to analyze participants' perception on the usefulness of

pronunciation strategies, in particular stress patterns. This category has another 16% of

frequency which is similar to the previous category and completes a 49% among the three

showing that everyone participating in this workshop gives high relevance to the items taught.

All students rated it with the highest score "very useful" (Ss survey W6). When I explained there

can be other ways to pronounce the same word, they immediately realized the importance of this

topic. Besides, in other comments on the JOU W6, I noticed that this pronunciation strategy is

not something learners are accustomed to taking into account at the moment of speaking English

and thus, it can cause a lot of trouble for them to communicate efficiently. In the non-participant

observation, there was also a comment on that subject matter: "learners identified the difference

of pronouncing with the correct stress and not doing it" (NPO Workshop 6) which is also

evidence of the importance of the pronunciation strategy.

The next three codes have to do with the level of difficulty learners had to implement

pronunciation strategies taught during the workshop. Starting with linking words with an 8% of

frequency, this aspect showed a very interesting challenge for participants who had to practice

several times in order to perform the strategy correctly (JOU W6). Taking into account Ss

Survey W6, two learners rated linking words as "somewhat difficult" and two others as

"difficult", which support my previous idea. On the non-participant observation he stated:

"students faced a challenge when trying to pronounce words linked after the teacher" (NPO W6).

After that, there was the item of perception about the difficulty of specific sounds, in this

case the use of the /v/ sound. Most of the learners had had the opportunity of practicing this

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sound before, and therefore did not have a lot of difficulty during the workshop. In fact, just

some drilling was necessary to have an acceptable level of production. However, in the students'

surveys, when learners were asked about the level of difficulty where 1 was very difficult and 5

was very easy, the four answers were different, ranging from easy, somewhat difficult, difficult

and very difficult. This evidently implies that the fact that they had studied this item before does

not mean it is simple for them. The teacher-observer agrees with me in the idea of learners

having little difficulty pronouncing the /v/ sound. according to his comment: "they produced the

/v/ sounds correctly and without too much hesitation." (NPO W6)

The next category has to do with the difficulty of stress patterns which has a 7% of

frequency and although it was kind of "new" to students, they had little challenge to perform this

strategy correctly. Besides, most of them rated it as "easy" (SS SURVEY W6) which supports

my analysis of this item. I found, one more time, participants are not used to paying attention to

stress when speaking English (JOU W6).

The following aspect to consider is "improvement when using pronunciation strategies".

There is a clear tendency towards the improvement participants could notice on their and their

classmates' intelligibility when putting into practice pronunciation strategies covered throughout

the workshop. It was evident on the instruments that learners improved somewhat their

intelligibility. with a frequency of 14%; this category plays an important role in the final results

of this workshop. When participants analyzed their and their classmates' progress, they all

agreed there was an increase in their ability to pronounce English in a correct way. Some

examples of this perception can be found on learners' and non-participant observer's answers to

the question on the achievement of some improvement:

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"I can use what I learned today in class, when I want to communicate in English, making myself understand better." (SS W6).

"I noticed that the use of these strategies helped me to understand how a native person can communicate. Besides, I learned new words and I could pronounce them better. On the other hand, I could listen and watch how my classmates did better at the end of the class than at the beginning because they practiced with the teacher with different examples." (SS W6)

"Yes, I noticed when my classmates and I repeated the word 2 times, the words were better than the first. Example: oven, I learned that the v has another sound. Another example: washing machine, when I speak the two words become one." (SS W6)

"Improvement was noticeable. Students could demonstrate that when they have the tools to perform better, in this case on their speaking part, they can do it." (NPO W6)

The next category is the virtual methodology of the class that needs to be considered; with only 5% of the data in the triangulation, this category has the lowest frequency and I was not clear that taking the class using the virtual environment was simple and allowed learners to understand the whole lesson easily. There were some connection issues that did not permit one of the students to listen well and actively participate in the class; consequently, communication was not as effective as it was in previous workshops and did not allow students to get the whole idea of the class (JOU W6). Two of the learners answered that it was easy to understand the workshop using the online video conference platform (SS W6). On the other hand, two of them expressed they did not like the platform and said they prefer others which are more stable. Besides, the observer made an emphasis on the advantage this platform provides to share multimedia content

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of different kinds. He commented the following when asked if he considered the platform as a useful tool to deliver the class:

"Yes, the teacher explained very easily and used different examples with the help of pictures and digital board." (NPO W6).

The final category to be analyzed has to do with the perception participants had about the difference between an online class and a face-to-face class involving pronunciation strategies. with a 9% of frequency this category shows some perceptions learners have towards virtual education: Some of them expressed that the platform used for the classes was very user-friendly and allows a lot of different features that make it more comprehensible when working with pronunciation tasks. Nevertheless, all of them concluded that a face-to-face lesson could be more effective specifically when learning pronunciation. On the students' survey I could gather some interesting comments:

"The difference with a face-to-face session is than you can better interact with the teacher and classmates, learning faster and with fewer distractions." (SS W6)

"When we can share with people, the learning process is nicer than we stay alone speaking through any device. However, it does not mean that the method is bad, is only less human." (SS W6)

Moreover, the non-participant observer made this comment:

"Using this multimedia tool is good, but there is always a chance that students can have connection interruptions and that can affect comprehension. There is nothing like being face-to-face to listen much better". (NPO W6)

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In summary, this sixth workshop re-confirmed the need students had to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better when speaking the target language. They considered this aspect very useful and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it had concerning their and their classmates' oral production. Among the strategies applied in this case, they seemed to be particularly more difficult than the other workshops. Learners did not know about linking words and did not take into account stress patterns at the moment of uttering and had to practice with them several times. With the pass of the time, people get more and more accustomed to study online as it saves a lot of time, energy and money. Platforms nowadays offer different kind of advantages for teachers and students at the moment of interacting with each other and checking materials, either written or multimedia.

Data Triangulation of the six workshops.

In the process of triangulation of the six workshops, seven categories, which can be observed in the table below, emerged by following the pawing theory as proposed by Bernard (2000). Get the reference. It can also be found the frequencies of the categories that occurred during the administration of the three instruments throughout this research project.

Table 4

Data triangulation, evaluation stage

Code/Category	Operationalization	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS			Total	Percentage
		STUDENT'S SURVEY	NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	TEACHER'S JOURNAL		

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Usefulness of linking words strategy	Code describes participants' perception about the usefulness of linking words pronunciation strategy taught during the workshops	41	12	14	67	17,2%
Usefulness of specific sounds strategy	Code describes participants' perception about the usefulness of specific sounds pronunciation strategy taught during the workshops	41	12	11	64	16,5%
Usefulness of stress patterns strategy	Code describes participants' perception about the usefulness of stress patterns pronunciation strategy taught during the workshops	41	11	13	65	16,7%
Difficulty to link words	Code describes the difficulty learners had to implement linking words pronunciation strategy taught.	24	7	10	41	10,5%
Failure to differentiate specific sounds	Code describes the difficulty learners had to implement specific sounds pronunciation strategy taught.	24	9	13	46	11,8%
Challenge using stress patterns	Code describes the difficulty learners had to implement stress patterns pronunciation strategy taught.	24	7	11	42	10,8%
Improvement when using pronunciation strategies	Code describes participants' perception about improvement when using pronunciation strategies taught during the workshops	30	12	22	64	16,5%
TOTAL		225	70	94	389	100,0%

.

The first three categories that came up during the triangulation process have to do with the usefulness of the pronunciation strategies taught throughout the six workshops. These initial categories had the highest frequency and resulted in 50.4% altogether. Along with the application

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of the three instruments, a little more than half of the frequencies indicated that participants considered pronunciation strategies to be an important feature to learn and practice while learning English as a foreign language. It was noticed that the pronunciation strategy that students gave the most value, by a small percentage, was linking words. Participants were very interested in this strategy as a way of improving their fluency when speaking English. The second strategy that students gave more value to was stress patterns; consequently, the third strategy, by a small margin, was specific sounds.

The next category to be analyzed in terms of frequency had to do with the improvement participants perceived they and their classmates had after being taught and put into practice pronunciation strategies. With a 16.5%, this item was very close to the first three categories and showed that students were able to notice some kind of improvement when speaking English throughout the activities in class, especially the performance (main task). Nevertheless, the time of instruction every group of students had to these pronunciation strategies was not enough exposure to be able to clarify in more depth this aspect.

Finally, there were the three last categories that evidenced the level of difficulty each pronunciation strategy had for learners. According to the frequency, distinguishing and producing specific sounds represented the highest challenge for learners. It showed a clear lack of knowledge and training on this subject matter but at the same time, as previously mentioned, students give a little less value to this strategy. The suprasegmental features of pronunciation presented less challenge for participants which at the same time aligns with the importance they give to these strategies.

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5. Findings

After implementing the six workshops in the action stage, gathering data, performing the evaluation and triangulation, there were several findings I want to describe during this section. In order to connect the data analysis with the research Objective which was improve learners' pronunciation through the explicit teaching of pronunciation strategies in online classes in Latin America, there was a clear impact that pronunciation strategies generated on participants. The analysis of the data that emerged from instruments applied during the implementation phase resulted in seven categories previously mentioned in the evaluation stage. Those categories confirmed and described the general and specific objectives of the study. Some of the most relevant findings include

Impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' performance.

Throughout the implementation of the workshops, all participants acknowledged that there was an improvement in their classmates' ability to pronounce English correctly as well as their own. They rated this aspect from medium to high improvement when answering the students' survey and during informal conversations during the lessons and pointed out that teaching pronunciation strategies should be part of any English course. This finding is connected to the first objective on this research study and at the end I can say the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies was positive on participants' improvement of this skill. This improvement was according to the exposure time participants had to the pronunciation strategies taught which was basically one hour. There is the possibility for a deeper understanding of this subject matter if there is the possibility to have learners more exposed to this kind of strategies.

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Effectiveness of each pronunciation strategy.

Another important objective of this research project was to identify the usefulness of the pronunciation strategies to see if they were at the same level or they had different levels. The evaluation stage concluded there was a strategy that had a little more importance for participants than the other and that was the linking words strategy. This suprasegmental feature of pronunciation called the attention of many learners who had not had the opportunity to know it and generated great interest in order for them to continue using it. The other two strategies regarding stress patterns and specific sounds use, had a very slight difference but anyway proved to be very effective and useful for participants who, in a vast majority, did not know them either.

Challenges when using pronunciation strategies.

The three remaining categories that came up after doing the triangulation analysis were related to the difficulty students had at the moment of putting into practice each pronunciation strategy. This can be linked with objective 3 describing the impact of each pronunciation strategies. With little but significant difference, identifying and producing specific sounds of the English language was at the end the most challenging strategy to use. This can be a result of learners' lack of training in phonetics as they expressed during the diagnostic stage and which should be a matter of concern for many teachers and institutions all along Latin America (which is the context of this study).

According to my experience, students in the region do not know there are special sounds in English that do not exist in Spanish (and Portuguese) and therefore they are using the Spanish pronunciation system and sounds to speak in English. Furthermore, the two other strategies showed a similar result establishing a somewhat difficulty linking words and using stress

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patterns. These strategies were also noticed as new for many participants who heard about them from me for the first time. They found these items quite important as well as challenging at the moment of pronouncing English correctly.

Based on the results of the workshop analysis it was confirmed the need students had to use pronunciation strategies in the EFL class to perform better orally. They considered this aspect very useful and had the opportunity to realize the positive effect it has concerning their and their classmates' oral production. Nowadays, a significant number of learners are getting more and more accustomed to virtual education and some of them even prefer this method as it was shown in the results of the data triangulation.

6.   Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, Limitations, And Questions for further Research

To conclude this research project after the administration of instruments for the diagnostic stage, implementation of the pedagogical intervention and posterior evaluation some conclusions emerged. They are connected to the research question, what is the impact of teaching Pronunciation Strategies on learners' pronunciation in online classes in Latin America?, and state new knowledge and theory for the Latin American English teachers community. Although there were some limitations, especially time-related as I applied each workshop in a different group and thus there was not a continuous process, there was a significant impact on students participating in the study.

First of all, Lane's (2010) idea, which was used as a relevant theoretical support for this project, about the importance learners give to pronunciation and the renewed recognition of this aspect as crucial for effective communication was proven right by participants of this study

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during the diagnostic stage. The vast majority of respondents gave a high or very high level of

relevance to learning good pronunciation as a key factor at the moment of studying English in

any kind of course.

Afterwards, it could be concluded with the evidence resulting from the implementation

that students noticed an improvement in their classmates' pronunciation and their own after being

instructed with pronunciation strategies. Most of the participants expressed through the surveys

that there was a positive impact of learning and practicing pronunciation strategies at the moment

of speaking English during the lesson tasks. This conclusion answers the research question I

stated related to the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' pronunciation.

Furthermore, the teacher's community in Latin America can apply the different strategies

implemented in this study, focusing on the most useful for learners, to enrich their classes.

Linking words is the strategy Latin American students give more value and are willing to

embrace throughout the lessons as an extra help to be able to communicate better in the foreign

language.

In addition, it can be concluded that there are some pronunciation strategies that present more

challenges than others in the EFL class. The study proved that identifying and producing specific

English sounds, which do not exist in Spanish, is more difficult for learners than linking words

for instance. The lack of training most Latin American students have on this subject should be a

matter of concern for the academic community in the region.

Moreover, there was an aspect that was not included in the evaluation stage but was present

through the entire project regarding online classes. Virtual education is becoming more and more

popular these days and the education community should be prepared to respond to the demands

on this need. Both, in the diagnostic and implementation stages, it was clear students like and

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approve online classes as a valid way to approach English language learning and they described several advantages it has.

For future studies related to this subject area, I would recommend evaluating the impact of teaching pronunciation strategies on learners' pronunciation in a longer period of time with a detailed follow up. Another aspect to be considered could be the implementation of several different pronunciation strategies that can include vowel sounds, a more intonation-focused strategy and rhythm patterns, among others.

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Appendix 1

Student's Survey, Diagnostic Stage.

El objetivo de este cuestionario es ayudar al desarrollo de un proyecto de investigación enfocado en identificar una problemática que afecte directamente el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en una escuela de idiomas privada.

. METODOLOGÍA Y PROCESO DE APRENDIZAJE: Responda las siguientes preguntas escogiendo una opción de acuerdo a su preferencia.

1. La enseñanza del inglés en la compañía es adecuada para sus necesidades personales y para responder a los exámenes nacionales e internacionales y exigencias del mundo laboral.

. <mark>De acuerdo</mark>

a. Parcialmente de acuerdo

b. Parcialmente en desacuerdo

c. En desacuerdo

2. Teniendo en cuenta su experiencia aprendiendo el idioma extranjero inglés en la compañía, ¿cuál es la principal dificultad para aprender esta lengua exitosamente?

. La poca intensidad horaria de la materia en cuestión (falta de tiempo del estudiante).

a. El plan de estudios de inglés

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b. La metodología de la clase

c. La dificultad del idioma en cuanto a vocabulario o gramática

d. La falta de motivación de los estudiantes.

e. Otra. ¿cuál?

_____

3. En el desarrollo de las clases de inglés, ¿qué tipo de actividades se le facilitan más para desarrollar?

. Lectura de oraciones o textos en inglés sobre temas diversos.

a. Escritura de oraciones o textos en inglés sobre temas diversos.

b. Escuchar y comprender a otras personas en el idioma extranjero sobre temas diversos.

c. Hablar frente a sus compañeros y docente sobre temas diversos con una pronunciación y fluidez entendible.

4. Al momento de desarrollar actividades en clase de inglés, ¿Cuál de las siguientes le resulta más compleja?

. Lectura de oraciones o textos en inglés sobre temas diversos.

a. Escritura de oraciones o textos en inglés sobre temas diversos.

b. Escuchar y comprender a otras personas en el idioma extranjero sobre temas diversos.

c. Hablar frente a sus compañeros y docente sobre temas diversos con una pronunciación y fluidez entendible.

.APRENDIZAJE EN METODOLOGÍA VIRTUAL

5. Las plataformas virtuales que ofrece la compañía contienen las herramientas que usted necesita para el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés

a) <mark>De acuerdo</mark>.

b) Parcialmente de acuerdo.

c) Parcialmente en desacuerdo.

d) En desacuerdo.

6) Estos espacios en línea son fáciles de usar y permiten desarrollar sus actividades de aprendizaje sin problema.

a) <mark>De acuerdo.</mark>

b) Parcialmente de acuerdo.

c) Parcialmente en desacuerdo.

d) En desacuerdo.

7) Las actividades propuestas por el programa en la plataforma le brindan oportunidades suficientes *(input)* para practicar sus habilidades orales

a) <mark>De acuerdo</mark>.

b) Parcialmente de acuerdo.

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c) Parcialmente en desacuerdo.

d) En desacuerdo.

.LA HABILIDAD ORAL

8) Al momento de hablar en inglés, ¿cuál es la principal dificultad que encuentra?

a) hablar con una velocidad adecuada.

b) saber la correcta pronunciación de las palabras que desea usar

c) <mark>encontrar el vocabulario adecuado para la idea que desea transmitir</mark>.

d) otra, ¿cuál?

_____

9) Ordene de 1 a 6 los aspectos que considera esenciales para su desempeño oral en inglés, siendo 1 el más importante y 6 el menos importante:

Pronunciación 3

Vocabulario 2

Gramática 1

Fluidez 4

Interacción 5

Temas para discusión 6

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10) ¿Tiene usted conocimiento del Alfabeto Fonético Internacional y la correcta pronunciación de los sonidos particulares del idioma inglés?

a) Mucho.

b) Poco.

c) Nada.

. PERCEPCIONES SOBRE LA EDUCACION VIRTUAL

11) En su opinión, ¿Qué ventajas existen en la educación virtual que usted recibe?

Manejo del tiempo – facilidad de acceso – mas confianza para hablar – homogeneidad de grupo

12) ¿Qué desventajas encuentra usted en este tipo de educación y que recomendaría para superarlas?

Poco contacto con los compañeros (facilitar contacto entre estudiantes) – no hay opción de recuperar clase (brindar oportunidad de recuperar clase).

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Appendix 2

Researcher's journal entry

Entry	Description	Date
1	Students at Berlitz are, in a very high percentage, people who work (especially professional people who work for companies) and who need English as a requirement to improve their professional profile and be more competitive in today's market.	February 20, 2021
2	Some students, depending on the level, have a very good level of fluency and accuracy. Some of them have had training on the correct pronunciation of English sounds (e.g. TH, R, V, Z sounds). Nonetheless, many other learners have much trouble to pronounce sounds and combination of sounds correctly, not having had the appropriate training.	March 15, 2021

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Appendix 3

Teacher's Interview, Diagnostic Stage.

EXPLORNG EFL LEARNING PROCESS

RATIONALE: The objective of this interview is to contribute to the development of a research project focus on identifying an issue affecting the English as a foreign language (EFL) learning process directly, In a private language school.

.Methodology and learning process.

1. What do think about the process of teaching English in the company in relation to students' needs? (to comply with national and international test and the market demand)

I think the company comply with many of students' needs. What students are looking for nowadays is shorter lessons and shorter processes, that is a trend right now in the market, and that is what the company offers.

2. According to your experience teaching English at Bertliz , what is the main difficulty for students to learn the language successfully?

Time, time and time. Why? Students are supposed, in any program, to have a little of practice outside the classroom. For a lot of students, it's not even possible, so they come to class not preparing the material, not even knowing what the material is bringing for the next class. That's the main problem, at least with the BVC program.

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3. During the English lessons, what activities do students perform more easily and which

ones are the most challenging for them? (Listening, speaking, reading or writing).

Explain

I think reading is very easy for them. Speaking not so much, and listening is the hardest one.

Writing, well, it all depends. In the Berlitz method we are not using writing as part of the

program. Some of them are willing to speak, according to their level, even if they're making

mistakes. But listening is the one that bring more challenges for them, as most of them don't

have any contact with English outside the classroom.

.**Online learning (e-learning)**

4. What is your opinion about the platforms used in the program? What do you think about

their tools/applications?

Well, it all depends not only in what our company is offering, but form outside companies, why?

A lot of companies nowadays have technical restrictions, security restrictions, software

restrictions. We were working with a previous platform, and it was difficult for us not only to

apply the method but share the material in the class, so we decided to move to an application. I

think it's good, it has some ups and downs. In some way Zoom is more sensitive when it comes

to connection, if you don't have a reliable and stable connection, it kicks you out of the

classroom. And tools, well, I think they're good. Nowadays a lot of software developers are

working on that, the more we advance in technology, the more user-friendly platforms and

applications we will have in the market. There is always an option for changing the platforms,

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according to the clients' needs, that's like the most difficult part, it's not only the platform itself, it's what they need.

5. How can you describe the learners' performance on the websites?

Relaxed. That is the idea of this online environment, for them to be relaxed, comfortable. They're actually learning at the comforts, at home, some of them at the office. The idea is to create a different environment to the one they have in the classroom. Easygoing, very opened, that's the best way for them to feel. Not only that, the performance, when you see a person is very relaxed, confident, comfortable, they perform easier. That's what I think, they perform really well when it comes to comparing live classes with the online process.

6. In your opinion what is the role of the activities in the program concerning the learners' oral production?

To develop fluency and confidence, there is something that is not in the books. When you need the student to produce speech you need that person to be confident and comfortable, that is not in books, but the idea is to provide that environment and activities should always be planned from the structure to have that confidence developed in students. That is what I have seen and what try to do in my classes, to make them feel comfortable and to do activities that are related to them and if they feel connected it would be much easier to develop a good oral production.

.**The speaking ability.**

7. In your opinion, what is the main difficulty students face at the moment of speaking?

Confidence and criticism, what others may think about their pronunciation, comprehension and fluency. It has an impact on students, why? Most of our students don't have time, they had

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terrible experiences in other places, so when they get here, they are full of traumas, so the idea is to make it very easy to understand, identify the problem and try to solve it.

8. What is the most important aspect to be considered when assessing the oral performance?

Pronunciation and fluency, these are the most important aspects when it comes to evaluating it has a strong influence

9. How useful do you consider the International Phonetic Alphabet in the teaching and learning of the speaking skill?

I don't know much about it, I have to be very honest, I've heard and I've seen a lot of examples… everything you use in class in order to have your students' achieve the goal use it… it should be implemented, somehow some students need extra helps, not only during class but also away from the method. We have a method here and we must be loyal to the method but if you can bring any tools that will help them improve and increase their speaking level, well, bring it. It would be a great tool not only for students but also for teachers.

10. **Perceptions about online learning.**

In your opinion, what are the advantages of online education (e-learning)?

It's not only a trend, it's a reality nowadays. And the reasons are very simple, people don't have more time to spend, and people need to learn wherever they are and any time they need it. That's the way we make the approach to the client, the client doesn't need to come to us, we go to them, that's the biggest advangeta. The other advantages, well, they are feeling comfortable, they are in control of their learning environment and that gives a sense of confidence.

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11. What disadvantages do you notice in this kind of learning? What would you recommend to overcome those challenges?

There is one external factor that really has a huge impact on the way we're teaching and is connections. Connections in our country are not reliable, maybe platforms are not user friendly, and some people are not true believer in this kind of method because they think it's not going to work.

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Appendix 4

Lesson plan 1

MAESTRÍA EN DIDÁCTICA DEL INGLÉS
UNIVERSIDAD DE CALDAS
FIRST WORKSHOP: Check in at a hotel

RESEARCHER: CHRISTIAN A. GOMEZ

This class will take place online using Zoom ® which is an online platform/App that allows students and instructors to connect lively with audiovisual interaction. This tool also permits teachers to share multimedia content displayed on his/her screen. In our lessons, I use the Student's Book provided by the company to go step by step covering the necessary points students need to review to accomplish the goal. Besides, there is an Illustration Book with a lot of visual content (pictures, graphics, maps, etc.). These two books are saved in the teacher's laptop in Portable Document files (PDFs). There are also audio files that teachers share with students at certain moments (when practicing the new vocabulary).

This workshop is going to be developed with students of level 2 (A1 elementary according to CEFR) during one of our sessions, using the usual material of the class and the Berlitz method. It will be a communicative class based on oral production as the company demands and features of pronunciation will help learners to improve their intelligibility while communicating in English.

Goal: (taking into account Berlitz method, goals should be customized according to the learners in each group and should focus in the language function)

Check-in at a hotel and talk to the hotel staff in your next vacation.

The teacher customizes the lesson goal asking the students the following questions:

- When you go on vacation, do you sometimes stay at hotels?

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- What do you do when you first arrive at the hotel?

- Do you sometimes need to talk to hotel employees?

Students' answers are … (something like *recorded on the screen and teacher highlights the words directly related to the hotel setting*)

Vocab to achieve goal: *(Select words needed for the achievement of the goal. What do my students need in order achieve the goal as well as to complete activities in class/home?)*

VERBS: to check-in, to check out, to carry

NOUNS: the first floor, a piece of luggage, concierge, housekeeping, maid, bellman, front desk clerk, room service

CONTEXTUAL EXPRESSIONS

Can you tell me where the vending machines are?

Grammar: Modal auxiliary Shall

Indirect questions in present tense

Language objectives

- To make polite offers with the modal auxiliary *Shall*

- To get information politely with indirect questions

Pronunciation objectives

- To link words and reduce unstressed vowels in spoken speech

- To identify and produce the sound /ɜ:/

- To apply intonation and stress rules in spoken discourse.

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PRE-TASK

The pre-task will consist of presenting the new vocabulary for learners to understand its meaning and make them practice with it. These pieces of vocabulary will be introduced by the teacher using different presentation techniques such as:

Picture description: The teacher is going to use a couple of pictures (see annex 1 & 2) and will point out items for students to identify some words like "the first floor" (and second floor, third, fourth, etc. annex 1) and bellman, a piece of luggage and front desk (annex 2). Students look at the pictures and identify the vocabulary (they ask for clarification if needed)

Asking questions (inductive method): teacher ask questions for words such as room service, housekeeping, maid, concierge and checkout using the inductive method in order for learners to discover the meaning of the words mentioned. Students are supposed to make connections of ideas that can lead them to identify the meaning of words. Samples of questions are listed below:

● Do you sometimes want someone to bring food or drinks to your room?

● When you spend a night at the hotel, do you need someone clean your room the next day?

Grammar will be introduced by the teacher using this question-answer inductive technique and students will practice the structures doing practical examples using the context of the lesson.

For instance: Indirect questions.

T: If you want to get a snack or a soft drink from a vending machine but you don't know where they are, how could you ask a hotel employee?

Ss: Formulate possible questions they can use in that particular case.

T: one suitable option would be: Can you tell me where the vending machines are?

Ss: practice repeating that question with different places or objects (restaurant, bar, gym, ATM, etc.)

TASK

The first part of the task will consist of presenting segmental and supra-segmental features of pronunciation using modeling. The teacher will introduce expressions that can be linked (e.g. a piece of luggage /əpisəv ˈlʌgɪdʒ/). After that, the teacher will present the sound /ɜː/ in the word first. Later, he will continue modeling the correct intonation for questions and finally he will model "stress" for some words. Students should drill each word or expression two or three times. Correct production will be checked in the practice and more repetition can take place.

Speaking task: Role-playing a speaking situation at a hotel

Students will take different roles (guest, front desk clerk, bellman/maid) and will role play a conversation about checking-in and using different hotel services using the vocabulary and structure seen in the unit.

The performance activity will take place at the end of the online lesson and students will be instructed to use the vocabulary seen throughout the unit. Teacher will use a checklist (see annex 3) to assess each of the features taught during the lesson while students are performing the real life situation during the roleplay (and after the class I will double check with the class recording).

POST-TASK

Feedback will be given to learners in two phases. First, there will be a positive reinforcement saying everything that learners performed correctly and statement of achievement of the main goal of the lesson; and second, the teacher will encourage self-correction and peer correction from learners for them to identify their mistakes and the way they could have done better, if there are any aspects that students could not correct, teacher will help. After that, the class will wrap

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up the lesson with the main points studied and finally there will be a farewell from everyone in

the class.

Annexes

1.

2.
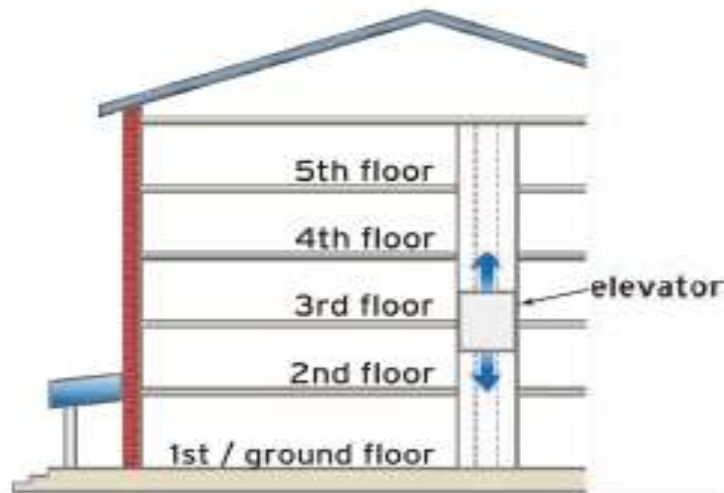
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3. Teacher Name: **Mr. Gomez**

Student
Name: _____

CATEGORY	2	3	4	5	Comments
Accuracy (stress)	Does not use the correct stress patterns for the studied items.	Partially uses the correct stress patterns for the studied items.	Uses the correct stress patterns for the studied items.	Uses the stress patterns for the studied items (e.g suitcase) in an outstanding way.	
Accuracy (specific sound /ɜː/)	Does not pronounce the specific sound correctly	Partially pronounces the specific sound	Pronounces the specific sound correctly.	Pronounces the specific sounds in an outstanding way.	
Fluency (linking words)	Does not link the reviewed items.	Partially links the reviewed items.	Links the reviewed items correctly.	Links the reviewed items in an outstanding way	
Fluency (intonation)	Does not intonate questions correctly	Partially intonates questions in the correct way	Intonates questions in the correct way	Makes outstanding intonation when asking questions	
Language use	Does not convey the appropriate meaning according to the context.	Partially conveys meaning according to the context.	Conveys the appropriate meaning according to the context.	Conveys meaning in an outstanding way according to the context.	
USE OF ICT TOOLS	Does not manage ICT tools appropriately.	Partially manages ICT tools	Manages ICT tools appropriately	Manages ICT tools in an outstanding way.	

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Appendix 5

Non-Participant Observation, Implementation stage.

MAESTRÍA EN DIDÁCTICA DEL INGLÉS

UNIVERSIDAD DE CALDAS

NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

RESEARCHER: CHRISTIAN A. GOMEZ

This observation form will be used by a teacher observer with the intention of compiling data on his thoughts towards the implementation of pronunciation strategies for students to improve intelligibility when speaking English and the use of ICT in the learning process. Please, give specific and detailed information on your insights about the learners' performance and behavior concerning the subject matter.

The use of pronunciation strategies.

Accuracy: (stress- Expected performance) Uses the correct stress patterns for the studied items.)
The teacher used controlled activities appropriately to model and facilitate learners' intelligibility when speaking. To achieve this goal, the teacher typed key sentences to help learners pronounce them by linking words and gave them the possibility to use visual aids, and vocabulary in context.
Accuracy: (expected performance) uses the /ɜː/ sound in the correct way.
Before the learners performed their conversation, the teacher gave the students the opportunity to practice the ɜː sound. To do it, he typed the vocabulary and sentences, so the learners had the chance to interact with the words while they image about the situation at a hotel was displayed

on the screen. I found that this previous practice helped learners to feel more confident during the speaking task and were actually able to pronounce the vocabulary appropriately in their conversations with very few mistakes.
Fluency: (expected performance) links words rehearsed during the lesson in the correct way. I found that the learners demonstrated fluency in their conversation and were able to link words appropriately.
Fluency: (expected performance) uses the correct intonation to convey the desired meaning. Intonation was taken into consideration by the students, I noticed that they followed the teacher's suggestions during previous practice and put it into practice during the conversations.
Communication: (expected performance) Conveys the appropriate meaning according to the context The conversations were very understandable, learners made few mistakes that did not interfere with intelligibility. They actually incorporated plenty of words and sentences they learned during the class through controlled and semi controlled activities promoted by the teacher.

1. Do you consider these pronunciation strategies useful for the teaching/learning process? Why?

   I consider that the pronunciation strategies were useful because the teacher was consistent in the use of scaffolding and elicitation techniques. He used meaningful images and key information about real life situations by following a chronological order in order to improve the level of complexity as the class went on. He also made sure the learners were able to demonstrate understanding by evaluating and approving the quality of each of their responses.

2. Do you think the use of pronunciation strategies was challenging for learners during the workshop? To what degree?

Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation

Yes, they were. The unit included vocabulary that is not commonly familiar for intermediate level. It was noticeable that some of the learners had difficulty to pronounce some words and link them with other words, but the teacher gave them different possibilities and situations in which they could practice those words in different sentences. This scaffolding techniques helped learners to overcome pronunciation difficulties during their speaking task.

3. How do you think using pronunciation strategies can improve learners' oral communication?

I found that the teacher Christian encouraged learners to use the context of visual aids to facilitate interaction with the input, at the same time, he remarked the importance of linking words, modeled intonation, promoted repetition and provided feedback in a timely manner. I find that those strategies are appropriate to improve learners' communication while they use pronunciation strategies at the same time.

4. Did you notice any improvement in students' intelligibility when using pronunciation strategies during the workshop? Which one(s)?

Yes, at first, the learners use long pauses to say sentences like (a piece of luggage), nevertheless, the teacher made that difficulty an opportunity to practice linking sentences by modeling the pronunciation of the short fragment (a piece of), after these teachers' interventions, the learners developed confidence and seemed to improved their pronunciation skills in those type of sentences.

The use of ICT in the learning process.

Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation

5. Do you think this workshop was easy to understand using the online videoconference

platform?

Yes, it was easy to understand. There was a short interruption because a student had an

issue with connectivity, but the teacher gave the opportunity to other learner to take his

turn while the problem was fixed.

6. How do you think it would differ from a face-to-face lesson?

In a face-to-face lesson, the learners would have more opportunities to interact among

themselves and eventually express more ideas to their colleagues, because these classes

online can be a little stressful for some students who can eventually experience high

affective filter.

7. Were participants' utterances more intelligible using the pronunciation strategies in the

online class?

Yes, I found that the ongoing intervention of the teacher during the class helped learners

be more intelligible. The most interesting thing, is that he did it in a way that seemed to

be positively accepted by the students because he gave them rewards but he also

pronounced the sentences again to reinforce and model the correct pronunciation. The

students noticed it and they seemed to take advantage of this as an opportunity to repeat

the sentence, confirm pronunciation and say thanks to the teacher for his feedback.

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Appendix 6

Students' Survey, Implementation stage.

MAESTRÍA EN DIDÁCTICA DEL INGLÉS

UNIVERSIDAD DE CALDAS

OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT: Survey for participants

RESEARCHER: CHRISTIAN A. GOMEZ

This survey will be applied at the end of the first workshop with the intention of compiling data on participants' thoughts towards the implementation of pronunciation strategies to improve intelligibility when speaking English and the use of ICT in the learning process. Please give specific and detailed information on your insights about the subject matter.

The use of pronunciation strategies.

1. How do you consider the Linking words strategy in "washing machine" & "turn on/off" in terms of:

   Useful _5_ 4 _3_2 _1_ Useless

   Easy _5_4 _3_ 2 _1_ Difficult

2. How do you consider the use of the / v / sound in "stove" or "oven" in terms of:

   Useful _5_ 4 _3_2 _1_ Useless

   Easy _5_4 _3_ 2 _1_ Difficult

3. How do you consider the use of stress patterns in "refrigerator" & "smartphone" terms of:

Useful _5_ 4 _3_ 2 _1_ Useless

Easy _5_ 4 _3_ 2 _1_ Difficult

4. How do you think using pronunciation strategies can improve your oral communication?

I think these strategies increase self-confidence to speak and it allows me to understand the languages better.

5. Did you notice any improvement in your and your classmates' speaking when using pronunciation strategies during the workshop? Which one(s)?

Yes, I notice when my classmates and I repeated the word for 2 times, the words were better than the first. Example: oven, I learned than the v has another sound. Other example: washing machine, when I speak the two words become one.

The use of ICT in the learning process.

6. Was this workshop easy to understand using the online video conference platform (Zoom)?

Yes, the teacher explained very easy and used different examples with the help of pictures and digital board.

7. How do you think it would differ from a face-to-face lesson?

In a face a face lesson we have more contact with the classmates and it allows us to create a better comradeship.

Influence of Pronunciation Strategies on Learners' Pronunciation

8. Were your classmates easier to understand using the pronunciation strategies in the online class?

Yes, because the pronunciation was more standard, and I better associate the word with the pronunciation.