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# Title: Foreign Language Acquisition: A Study on the Development of English Pronunciation Skills by Majorcan Secondary Education Students

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**Abstract**

This work studies the effectiveness of the use of explicit and implicit pronunciation instruction in lessons of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a secondary education school in Majorca. Oral data were collected from 26 students through a pronunciation test carried out before (pre-test) and after (post-test) a sequence of lessons including a diversity of materials covering English pronunciation both explicitly and implicitly. The study measured the quality of students' pronunciation gathered from the audio samples. A contrastive analysis between Spanish, Catalan and English was used in order to provide evidence of possible linguistic transfer in relation to students' English pronunciation. Results are satisfying in that they confirm the usefulness of pronunciation instruction in secondary education EFL lessons.

**Keywords:** EFL, cross-linguistic influence, contrastive phonetics, implicit-explicit pronunciation instruction

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## 1. Introduction and justification

As is widely known, the Balearic Islands are characterised by the presence of a multicultural and multilingual population. The area can be regarded as a complex and rich environment in which individuals exchange and share knowledge of different cultures and languages. As a result, the educational sphere is as complex as the rest of the contexts. Classrooms are filled with students with varied backgrounds and linguistic situations, which makes the profession of teaching languages a highly demanding one.

In 2013 a law passed which affected the education sphere in Spain. It was aimed at modifying the previous law, namely the *Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación* (“the Organic Law of Education 2/2006, of the 3rd of May”). The objective of this law was to improve the quality of Spanish education. It established a series of changes in the education field, which constructed a curriculum that paid special attention to communicative skills, understanding curriculum as the regulation of the elements that determine the processes of teaching and learning (*Ley Orgánica 8/2013*).

There are additional documents that regulate education both in Spain and in the Balearic Islands. These legal documents are: the *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa (LOMCE)* (“the Organic Law 8/2013, of the 9th of December, for the Improvement of the Educational Quality”) and the *Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre, por el que se establece el currículo básico de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y del Bachillerato* (“the RD 1105/2014, of the 26th of December, in which the Basic Compulsory Secondary and Upper-secondary Curriculums are stated”). Additionally, there is also the *Decreto 34/2015, de 15 de mayo, por el que se establece el currículo de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria en las Islas Baleares* (“Decree 34/2015, 15 May, which states the Curriculum for Secondary Education in the Balearic Islands”).

As stated in the current educational law (*Ley Orgánica 8/2013*), mastering a second or even a third foreign language has become a priority in the modern globalised world. Additionally, the European Union claims that multilingualism is necessary to build a common project. Hence, this law seeks to encourage

multilingualism and students' fluency in foreign languages. Moreover, it places the ability to produce and understand both written and spoken texts as a crucial element to improve employability.

The capacity of speaking and communicating in other languages is becoming a key factor in today's society. Therefore, following the recommendations of the European Commission, the current legislation seeks to educate students to be able to express themselves in two or more foreign languages, regardless of their linguistic background (*Orden ECD/65/2015*). However, and despite the efforts made to enhance students' fluency in foreign languages (mostly English), this skill is still the most remarkable weakness found in the Spanish educational system.

The curriculum also fosters a competency-based education which should provide students with the necessary tools to become competent adults and citizens of the world. This methodology implies students' ability to use and adapt their knowledge to different types of situations and tasks. The competences that they have to develop are known as the key competences, and they are defined as the combination of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes appropriate for each context (*Orden ECD/65/2015*). The seven key competences established in the curriculum are: "the Linguistic Competence", "Competence in Mathematics", "Competence in Science and Technology", "Digital Competence", "the Competence of Learning to Learn", "Social and Civic Competences", "the Competence of Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship", and "the Competence of Cultural Awareness and Expression".

Of all these competences, the most relevant for this study is the linguistic competence, which is the ability of students to interact with other people in a variety of communicative situations. The linguistic competence does not only encourage students to be able to understand and express themselves with other people, but it is also considered to be culturally enriching and especially relevant when it comes to foreign language learning (*Decreto 34/2015, 2019*). To promote this competence the law highlights the importance of adopting more active and interactive methodologies in opposition to the more traditional ones (*Orden*

*ECD/65/2015*). In this light, the Spanish educational system should be adapted in order to meet the requirements of modern-day society.

When developing the linguistic competence, teachers and learners should take into consideration the five components that it is constituted by. These components are: “the linguistic, the pragmatic-discursive, the sociocultural, the strategic and the personal components” (*Orden ECD/65/2015*, p. 6992-6993). Within the linguistic component, one can find phonology, lexis, and grammar (among others). Therefore, phonology has become an essential dimension that needs to be tackled in English as a Foreign Language lessons (hereinafter referred to as EFL) in Spain. Nonetheless, not all the teachers have the necessary skills to do it, emerging here a debate on the quality of EFL teacher training in Spain.

As stated by Cenoz and García Lecumberri, “the perception and production of speech sounds are [...] an integral part of the processes of language comprehension and production in human communication” (1999, p.3). The recent emphasis placed on communication and speaking skills makes it an area of importance in the field of teaching. Consequently, the current Foreign Language Curriculum for Secondary Education in the Balearic Islands has been divided into four blocks which deal respectively with spoken and written perceptive skills and spoken and written productive skills. Hence, speaking and pronunciation have gained importance basically because speaking is the basis of a correct linguistic competence. For this reason, teaching and learning practices need to be adapted to a communicative approach, as well as to the current linguistic situation faced in the classrooms.

The existing curriculum also places emphasis on reading skills to improve both students’ linguistic abilities and their linguistic baggage to be able to communicate appropriately. Reading is, therefore, the means through which a good linguistic competence is achieved. However, the amount of time that students devote to reading in class is not enough to develop good reading habits. Moreover, to be fluent in a language, students should be exposed to different types of situations and contexts to stimulate different learning processes (*Orden ECD/65/2015*, 2019).

The multicultural and multilingual environment of a secondary education classroom in Majorca calls for the need of providing EFL teachers with adequate and useful methodologies they can use to teach and improve students' pronunciation. Through a mixed approach, this study seeks to provide evidence of the necessity to introduce pronunciation instruction in early stages of secondary education classrooms as students not only seem to have a defective pronunciation, but they also lack basic knowledge on the functioning of the English language sound system.

Following the arguments stated above, it is of great importance to adapt EFL teaching in the Spanish education in order to provide students with updated and meaningful material to help them to communicate and be fluent in English. Notably, English has always been a cause for concern in Spain and according to the *English Proficiency Report* published by Education First in 2018 (Education First, 2019), Spain is in position thirty-two out of eighty-eight countries in the ranking, with the quality of "medium" proficiency in English. This is clear evidence that some changes need to be implemented in EFL teaching, more specifically in terms of communication and pronunciation skills.

The initial intention of this study was to use a computer program that provided students with immediate feedback on their pronunciation. However, this was not possible due to the fact that the software analysed the recordings in relation to the materials included in its practice section, and it would therefore not consider the additional work and activities introduced in the sequence of lessons. For this reason, an alternative to this program was to gather audio samples and examine them according to the relevant aspects provided in the following sections.

This study is based on arguments considering pronunciation an essential component of foreign language acquisition and is triggered by students' inability to communicate effectively in English. The mutual influence of pronunciation skills and language proficiency is key in determining the importance of pronunciation practice in EFL lessons.

Several elements will be tackled in this research. Firstly, a review of the most relevant literature on pronunciation teaching and language learning will be

presented (Section 2). Secondly, Section 3.2 compares Spanish (L1)/ Catalan (L1) and English (L2) pronunciation to find evidence of possible language interference in students' pronunciation of the L2. In Section 4.2, a pronunciation test for Spanish speakers will be carried out to identify the most challenging sounds found in the English language. Suprasegmental features, although also relevant, are beyond the scope of this study, which will focus mainly on consonants and vowel quality. However, it can be considered an area of interest for further research as these features are hardly dealt with in Spanish EFL classrooms.

## **2. Theoretical background and literature review**

Lado (1973) claims there is enough evidence to confirm that when learning a language, speakers tend to transfer elements from their mother tongue. Moreover, Celce-Murcia (1996, p.19) states that “second language acquisition is filtered through the learner’s first language, with the native language facilitating acquisition in those cases where the target structures are similar, and ‘interfering’ with the acquisition in cases where the target structures are dissimilar or non-existent”.

According to this premise, in 1957 Robert Lado’s seminal work laid the foundations for the field of *contrastive analysis*. This theory is based on the comparison of two languages and cultures aimed at finding potential difficulties speakers of one language may encounter when learning another language (Lado, 1973). To undertake this analysis and to compare phonemes, there are several elements to be considered. Selinker (1992) summarises Lado’s theory arguing that: the first one is to see whether the L1 has a phoneme that is phonetically similar to that of the L2; the second is to consider the similarities between allophones in the two languages; the last one is to see whether the phonemes are equally distributed in both languages. The main focus of contrastive analysis in language learning is to provide a comparison between L1 and L2, identify the problematic areas, and according to the findings, ameliorate teaching materials (Johansson, 2008). Still, Johansson (2008, p. 11) argues that “language learning cannot be understood by a purely linguistic study”.



This theory, although widely accepted at first, was later questioned by contemporaries, “primarily on the basis of its inability to predict the degree of difficulty learners could experience with a given item and on the basis of conflicting evidence from error analysis and interlanguage research” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 20). However, Wardhaugh (1970) opted for a ‘weaker’ variation of this theory arguing that it could be used to explain at least some of the errors appearing in language learning. Yet, the *contrastive analysis* should be supported by the notion of *error analysis*, which, as proposed by Banathy and Madarasz in their reports (1969), could be used to prove the value of contrastive analysis and by extent, its potential pedagogical applications.

As stated by Richards (1971, p. 3) “the field of error analysis may be defined as dealing with the differences between the way people learning a language speak, and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language”. However widespread the popularity of international English might be, this comparison should be done with native speakers, on the grounds that their language is unadulterated. Even so, it must be noticed that these errors can vary according to differences between dialects and linguistic variations.

Nowadays, “researchers agree that *interference* (now more commonly referred to as *negative transfer*) [...] is valid in second language pronunciation acquisition” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 20). *Interference* makes reference to the “use of elements from one language while speaking another, and may be found at the level of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and meaning” (Richards, 1971, p. 10). This term is applicable in pronunciation practice because students tend to reproduce sounds of their L1 when they face words in the L2.

According to studies of interlanguage phonology, “learner’s first language background entirely dictates the second language acquisition process” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 22). Moreover, Celce-Murcia (1996, p. 28) provides a compilation of all the relevant elements affecting second language phonology acquisition. The most evident would be L1 transfer, followed by the degree to which negative transfer affects a learner’s acquisition process. Additionally, “the learner’s age is a factor in phonological acquisition” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 28).

Furthermore, some authors argue that when teaching a language to adolescents and adults, the aim should be intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, 1996, Atar, 2018); understanding intelligibility as the ability of a speaker to convey a message successfully (Muñoz & Pavón, 2019).

The process of learning foreign languages involves creating a new linguistic system, known as *interlanguage* (Selinker, 1970). According to Celce-Murcia (1996, p. 22), this term refers to a “separate linguistic system”, which could be placed in between the two languages being learnt. That is, interlanguage is placed between the L1 and the L2. In addition, Johansson refers to *interlanguage studies* as “the study of learner language as a system” (Johansson, 2008, p. 11). The focus of *interlanguage studies* is to “show the gradual development towards the target language, [...] including a comparison with first language acquisition” (Johansson, 2008, p 11).

A relevant aspect of interlanguage is that it fossilises, that is, “it ceases to develop at some point short of full identity with the target language” (Selinker, 1992; Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 21). However, “there is nothing in the SLA [Second Language Acquisition] literature to suggest that some effects of fossilisation cannot be bypassed in the learning/teaching process if the emphasis is placed on communicative abilities in context” (Selinker, 1992, p. 252). This is why it is relatively necessary to focus more on communicative skills in order to transcend the difficulties underlying the process of fossilisation.

The usefulness found in the comparison of two languages in order to identify the potential challenging features in language learning led to the spread of *contrastive phonetics*. In the field of linguistic studies, contrastive analyses (e.g. L1 vs. L2 phonetics) are used to determine the existing differences between the structures in order to establish a set of difficulties that may condition the process of learning a language (Crystal, 2008).

As stated before, age is a crucial factor in language learning. According to the *Critical Period Hypothesis*, “there is an optimal period for language acquisition, ending at puberty” (Abello-Contesse, 2009, p. 170). When reaching the end of that period, the process of learning a language is supposed to become more laborious. Nonetheless, when it comes to pronunciation, Flege (1995, p.

233) assumes that “the phonetic systems used in the production and perception of vowels and consonants remain adaptive over the life span”. Hence, when learning an L2, the phonetic system needs to be reorganised, adding new sounds or modifying the sounds existing in the speaker’s L1 (Flege, 1995).

In the last decades, there has been a growing interest in the acquisition of foreign language pronunciation. Accordingly, there is a wide range of studies related to the teaching and learning of pronunciation, especially concerning second language acquisition. Several methods of language teaching developed two general approaches to pronunciation: the *intuitive-imitative approach* and the *analytic-linguistic approach* (Celce-Murcia, 1996). The former focuses on students imitating given sounds, whereas the latter provides students with explicit information like the phonetic alphabet.

There is a belief that phonology is in the core of a language and needs to be paid special attention (Darcy, 2018). Nevertheless, current ESL teaching practices pay little attention to pronunciation in class, mostly because of the lack of instruction in the teaching of pronunciation in second language learning (Park, 2015). Students’ pronunciation depends heavily on the way it is dealt with in class. Apparently, the methodologies present in Spanish secondary education do not focus on pronunciation and, therefore, students are not aware of many of the different phonetic inventories of English, Spanish, and Catalan. Consequently, this lack of correct production can lead to problems in understanding the meaning of the conversation (Aydin & Akyüz, 2017).

For this reason, more time should be devoted to teaching pronunciation in EFL classrooms, for students are neither aware of the phonological system nor acquainted with the English pronunciation itself. Additionally, Muñoz & Pavón, reckon the importance of pronunciation as an “integral element of oral communication [...] and it should not be treated as a separate entity” (2019, p. 115).

As stated by Baker (2014, p. 139) mentioned by Üstünbaş (2018, p. 71) “teachers’ and learners’ beliefs about pronunciation instruction and classroom-based research on it has been limited [...] [and] has remained largely unexplored”. Nonetheless, recent studies have focused on the instruction of

pronunciation in EFL classrooms (Tejeda & Basurto, 2014; Üstünbaş, 2018), and other studies have focused on the use of questionnaires to gather information on the teaching and learning of English pronunciation (Nowacka, 2012). In accordance, the participants in this study were asked to answer a questionnaire in order to gather information on the instruction of EFL pronunciation in their high school.

As extracted from the English language curriculum, explicit knowledge on English phonology is not assessed in Spanish secondary schools until the students reach the 2nd year of Post-Obligatory Secondary Education (*Bachillerato* in Spanish) and have to take the university access exams. It is true that there are textbooks containing some activities dealing with pronunciation, but it appears that not so many teachers use them in class. Moreover, the common way of teaching EFL in Spain is focusing on grammar, writing, and vocabulary, giving less importance to pronunciation (Calvo Benzies, 2013). This lack of awareness of the phonological system can be one of the reasons of the defective pronunciation shown by the students, as L2 learning requires the knowledge of the different phonological forms (Carlet & Kivistö de Souza, 2018).

Several studies have shown that focusing explicitly on pronunciation skills is not enough to improve pronunciation in students' speaking (Carlet & Kivistö de Souza, 2018). However, in the process of teaching pronunciation, both the advantages and disadvantages of each approach need to be considered. Other studies have been carried out to support either explicit or implicit pronunciation instruction. By contrast, Üstünbaş (2018, p. 73) states that "most of [the] studies have supported explicit pronunciation teaching". By learning the phonetic symbols and how they are produced, students are more aware of the sounds per se. Moreover, as stated by Saito (2011, p. 850) the "type of instruction can be a relatively important variable, especially in terms of instructional effectiveness on students' pronunciation performance at different processing levels".

Harmer (2007, p. 251) argues that "some teachers complain that learning symbols places an unnecessary burden on students". However, if this is done gradually, and focusing on identification rather than on transcription at lower levels, it could help them improve their pronunciation significantly. In this study,

the idea of introducing phonemic symbols in secondary education EFL lessons is believed to be beneficial for the students

Apart from the two types of pronunciation instruction, there are several factors that may affect the process of learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. Among these factors, one can find the difference between the sounds of the two languages. According to Muñoz and Pavón (2019, p. 115):

the differences between the Spanish and English sound system have a physiological explanation, the teacher should provide students with the required knowledge to identify the articulatory reasons why inaccurate approximations of new sounds are produced and, to avoid these potential errors in language production. To do so, the teacher must have a good command of the articulatory features of both the Spanish and English language.

As already mentioned, one of the main inconveniences found in the Spanish educational system is the lack of pronunciation instruction in secondary education classrooms. This may not only be because of the lack of resources but also the lack of formal instruction by the teachers in this subject. For this reason, it is necessary to introduce formal instruction in EFL teacher training courses.

As claimed by Üstünbaş (2018, p. 73), “although researchers and teacher educators have called for more attention to the incorporation of pronunciation instruction in language classes, the L2 learners’ responses suggest that they are either not getting instruction or, if they are, they are not benefiting from it.” In this light, teachers and schools should call for a change and provide teachers with the necessary tools to improve in this field. Therefore, “teachers must have at their disposal a working knowledge of articulatory phonetics, theories of second-language phonological acquisition, and an up-to-date command of techniques and procedures to use in the classroom” (Parish, 1977 as stated in Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 29).

Additionally, and as a consequence of the lack of a good command of the English language, students tend to have problems when reading a text. As stated by O’Connor (1987, p. 7), mentioned by Montes (2006, p. 24):

It is very useful to have written letters to remind us of the corresponding sounds, but this is all they do; they cannot make us pronounce sounds which we do not already know [...] it is not always easy to know what sounds the letter stands for.

Student's ability to pronounce correctly a word is highly influenced by their ability to recognise that particular word. Hence, regarding English language learning, it seems that students' pronunciation is negatively affected by poor linguistic baggage and a lack of knowledge of the phonetic rules. According to this fact, several aspects concerning EFL lessons in Spain are under scrutiny in this study, in an attempt at providing an insight into the reasons to why (most) secondary education students in Spain do not manage to achieve a considerable proficiency in English, even though they start learning the language at the age of six.

Despite the relevance of the shortcomings present in Spanish methodologies in EFL teaching, the complexity of the English language is another factor that conditions the process of acquiring this language. Several studies have delved into this complexity, establishing a significant distance between its pronunciation and the orthographic representation (Montes, 2006). The root of this complexity is found in the historical evolution of the English language, which has undergone multiple changes all over the centuries (Montes, 2006). Because of historical and social events, "the English language shows frequent lack of correspondence between sound and spelling. This lack of correspondence contributes to making pronunciation one of the most difficult areas in the acquisition of English as a foreign language" (Cenoz & García, 1999, p. 4). Moreover, as pointed out by MacKinnon and Waller (1987), mentioned by Montes (2006, p. 24), there is a lack of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation of the English language that a reader can face when approaching a text. These factors are the following:

- One letter can have different phonemes, like the <a> in *fall*, *far*, *fat*, *fame* and *about*, which is pronounced as follows: /ɔ:/, /ɑ:/, /æ/, /ei/, /ə/.
- Two letters (e.g. <sh>, <th> <mm>) for just one sound (/ʃ/, /θ/, /m/, respectively); as in *shoe*, *theatre* and *commitment*.
- Redundant letters, which is the case of <x, q, c> to express the sound /k/ in *case*, *explicit*, *queue*
- Letters that do not correspond to any phoneme, like <p> in *psalm*
- The lack of orthographic representation of a phoneme like in *lieutenant* /leftenant/

- The representation of another phoneme, that is, the writing of a letter that corresponds to another phoneme, as is the case of <m> in *comptroller* /kontroulə/

Thus, students need to learn to establish a connection between the reading and the oral production, inasmuch as they are interrelated. Reading skills should also play an important role in EFL classrooms. Nonetheless, in most of the Spanish EFL classrooms students do not have a reading habit. That is why a reading program should be introduced in all secondary education schools since it is another key factor that affects students' fluency in English.

Apart from the distance between the English language pronunciation and spelling, and the flaws found in the way English is taught in Spain, there are other factors that condition students' and teachers' activities in high school lessons. These factors can be divided into two groups, namely the cognitive, and the affective and social factors (Vila, 1997). These factors condition the process of learning and teaching inside a classroom. It is important to analyse these factors as they will determine the effectiveness of an approach or methodology. Moreover, students' attitudes towards a topic (e.g. English pronunciation) have a considerable influence in the way they address it. Because of the complexity of English pronunciation, some students can grow a negative attitude towards it, impeding an effective learning process.

In addition to the factors stated above, linguistic interference is known to influence students' linguistic abilities. According to Suárez Suberviola (2006), there are several reasons that take part in pronunciation errors. One of the main reasons is L1 interference, which is "the wrong generalisation of rules or tendencies and influence of the written form" (2006, p. 67). Speakers of a different L1 will have difficulties with sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue, as for instance, the English sound schwa /ə/. Allophonic variation is another factor interfering in the correct pronunciation. Additionally, consonant clusters that are not known in Spanish pronunciation may cause a defective pronunciation, as is the case of /kt/ in *asked* (Suárez Suberviola, 2006).

### **3. Contrastive analysis: comparing Spanish/Catalan and English sounds**

#### **3.1 Features of sound production**

First and foremost, some terms will be defined according to their relevance in this study. All the terms mentioned below are features of the sounds produced by an individual when speaking a language. According to House (2006, p. 35-36), the elements that are of importance are, among others:

- a) Vowels: “sounds produced with no obstruction to the air flow. In other words, the mouth remains open or at least half open. The different vowel sounds are produced by slight changes in the shape of the mouth and parts of the vocal tract. Vowels can be long or short.”
- b) Diphthongs: “vowel sound that starts with the sound of vowel and ends with the sound of another one, together with the corresponding changes in the shape of organs of speech.”
- c) Consonants: “sounds that stop the vowels. They involve an interruption in the air flow, but the extent to which the air is interrupted varies enormously.”

Moreover, consonant sounds can be classified according to the following features (House, 2006, p. 35-36):

1. Voiced and unvoiced: whether the vocal cords vibrate or not when a consonant sound is produced.
2. Place of articulation: Consonant sounds are given different names depending on where in the vocal tract they are produced. The consonants are classified according to the organs involved when articulating a sound.
3. Manner: “this refers to the degree to which the airflow is obstructed. The range in the manner of articulation goes from total obstruction, like the sound /p/ (a plosive) to only very slight obstruction, where the sound is almost like a vowel, for example, /w/ (a glide)” (House, 2006, p. 36).

Taking the aforementioned elements into account, House (2006, p. 36) claims that “producing the correct sounds depends on understanding the importance of



these mechanisms of articulation. A change in the voicing, manner, place or shape of articulation can have a critical effect on the words we are producing". This also justifies the fact that EFL lessons should include instruction on all the elements that take part in the production of a specific sound. Therefore, an explanation of the places and manners of articulation is crucial, and EFL teachers should devote time explaining and showing them to the students.

There are several parts in the mouth that take part in the production of a consonant sound in English. The ways in which the organs are put together will determine the type of sound produced, as summarised in Figure 1.

	<u>Lower articulator</u>	<u>Upper articulator</u>
<b>Labial</b>		
Bilabial	lower lip	upper lip
Labiodental	lower lip	upper teeth
<b>Apical</b>		
Dental	apex of tongue	upper teeth
Alveolar	apex of tongue	alveolar
Retroflex	apex of tongue (And even underside of tongue)	palate
<b>Frontal</b>		
Alveopalatal	front of tongue	alveolar and far front of tongue
Prepalatal	front of tongue	front of palate
<b>Dorsal</b>		
Palatal	back of tongue	back of palate
Velar	back of tongue	velum
Uvular	back of tongue	extreme back of velum or uvula

Figure 1. Basic points of articulation (Salcedo, 2010, p. 196)

As shown in Figure 1, bilabial sounds involve both lips (/p, b, m/), like /p/ in "peanut", /b/ in "bed" and /m/ in "mouth" whereas labio-dental sounds involve the upper teeth and the lower lips coming together (/f, v/) (Celce-Murcia, 1996; Yavas, 2005; Salcedo, 2010) as shown by the initial sound of the words "fear" or "very". Interdental sounds /θ, ð/ are produced by putting the tongue between the upper and lower teeth, which occurs in the words "theatre" and "rhythm". Alveolar sounds are produced when there is a contact of the tongue and the alveolar ridge, and the correspondent phonemes are: /t, d, s, z, n, l/ (Celce-Murcia, 1996; Yavas, 2005; Salcedo, 2010), like in the words "teacher", "dentist", "sauce", "zoo", "nature" and "large". Palato-alveolar sounds /ʃ, ʒ, dʒ, tʃ/ consist of moving the

apex of the tongue towards the back of the alveolar ridge like in “sheep”, “treasure” “judge” and “cheap”. Retroflex sounds, are produced by a curling of the tongue “up and back towards the back of the alveolar ridge” (Yavas, 2005,p7) for example, in Standard American English, <r> is considered retroflex being “real” and “river” examples of this sound. Palatal /j/ as in *youth* is produced by the tongue near the hard palate (Celce-Murcia, 1996;Yavas, 2005; Salcedo, 2010), whereas velar sounds /g, k, ŋ/ are produced with the tongue on the soft palate, as in *gang*. Glottal sounds are produced by “air passing from the windpipe through the vocal cords: /h/ as in *hi* (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 43). Finally, according to Yavas (2005), the sound /w/ (e.g. *wool*) has two places of articulation, namely the lips and the velum (labio-velar), although Celce-Murcia classifies it as bilabial (Celce-Murcia,1996).

The manner of articulation is “the degree and the kind of obstruction of a consonant in the vocal tract (Yavas, 2005, p.7). Thus, consonants can be stops, fricatives, affricates, approximants, and nasals. When producing a stop /p, b, t, d, k, g/ a total blockage of the airflow is produced and when the air from the lungs is not totally stopped, the fricative sounds /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/ are produced. Affricates /tʃ, dʒ/ are a combination of stops and fricatives, whereas approximants /l, ɹ, j, w/ are produced with a more opened vocal tract, causing no friction. Nasals /m, n, ŋ/ involve the nasal cavity in the production.

The different places of articulation should be explained by using a picture in which all the places can be identified by the students. Otherwise, they will not be able to associate the articulators with the corresponding position in the vocal tract.

The place and manner of articulation of sounds vary from one language to another. Therefore, when learning a language, it is necessary to learn how the sounds are produced in that language, to identify and compare the sounds of the L1 and the L2. Once the features that determine the type of sounds produced in English have been established, the following section will be devoted to the contrastive analysis between Spanish, Catalan, and English.

### 3.2 Contrastive phonetics: Comparing Spanish/Catalan and English sound systems

As mentioned in the previous sections, a language is constituted by sounds. Whether these sounds are similar or not to one's L1 will determine the difficulty encountered by a speaker when producing them. When it comes to language teaching, comparing two languages provide teachers with the necessary information to identify and predict potential problems students of a foreign language might encounter, and be prepared to solve them (Lado, 1973). The focus of this section will be to establish the connections and distinctions between Spanish/Catalan and English

To compare two languages, Cámara (2012) presents the terms of *mixed minimal pairs* and *mixed approximant minimal pairs*. On the one hand, *mixed minimal pairs* are pairs of words (one English and one Spanish word, for example) that share similar or identical vowel/consonant sounds. On the other hand, *mixed approximant minimal pairs* are pairs of words that differ in more than one segment like the words *ten-ten* (imperative of the verb *to have* in Spanish, and number ten in English) differ both in the sound /t/ and /e/ (Cámara, 2012), because of the sound features of the phoneme /t/. The author further presents the ability to use (quasi-)neologisms to compare words in Spanish and English. That is, to use words that despite not existing or not having meaning in Spanish, they can be compared to existent English words like in the case of *Sam-sam* (Cámara, 2012, p.15). By presenting pairs of words, speakers can compare and identify the similarities and differences that those two words have, and modify their pronunciation if necessary.

These techniques, used to compare words and sounds, can be additionally supported by the establishment of an intersection between the two languages (Cámara, 2012). This process consists of the presentation of a set of phonological sounds which are similar or equivalent in the two languages that are being studied. This intersection of sounds is constituted by a list of words in which the learner can identify a particular sound in both her/his mother tongue and the foreign language being learnt. For example, the English word *chocolate* 'chocolate' and the Spanish word *chiste* 'joke' share the sound /tʃ/, and the words

*zinc* (Sp.) and *think* (En.) share the same sound /θ/ (Cámara, 2012). This intersection can also be extended to vowel sounds, although it is a more complex process as there are several additional features to consider.

The creation of an intersection of sounds can be equated to the creation of an interlanguage. That is, creating a new language system in a speaker's brain by the construction of elements departing from the similarities between the two languages. However, it should be noticed that the similarity in the spelling of two words does not imply an identical pronunciation of that spelling, and it may cause confusion. For example, the word *exposure* would be surely pronounced by Spanish speakers in the following way: /ɛksposur/ rather than /ɪkspəʊzər/, because the students apply their mother tongue system when reading the English word, and the letter <s> will be pronounced with the Spanish sound /s/ and not the target sound /ʒ/, due to its absence in the Spanish phonological system, as it will be explained later on. For this reason, reading skills should provide students with greater knowledge of the identification and pronunciation of different sounds.

Apart from consonants, vowels play an important role in the development of pronunciation skills. When producing a vowel sound, the difference in pronunciation will be measured according to the degree of the opening of the mouth, and the position of the lips and the tongue. Daniel Jones' Diagram (see Figure 2), presents a geometric form which determines the position in the mouth where the sound is produced according to the position of the tongue and the lips. As seen in the figure, there are 12 vowel sounds which are produced differently. Vowels are classified according to "the vertical distance between the upper surface of the tongue and the palate, and secondly the part of the tongue, between front and back, which is raised highest" (Roach, 2000, p. 12).

Vowel sounds can be 'high'/'low', 'front'/'back', 'open'/'close'. The so-called cardinal vowels are the "vowels that are most familiar to the speakers of most European languages" (Roach, 2000, p. 14), among these vowels one can find the front vowels /i, e, ɛ, a/ and the back vowels /u, o, ɔ, ɑ/. The close vowels are /ɪ, ʊ/ whereas the open vowels are /a, ɑ/ (Roach, 2000, p. 14). There are some vowels that are called 'rounded' because of the position of the lips when

producing them. The rounded sounds in English are “/u, ʊ, o, ɔ/” (Yavas, 2005, p. 12).

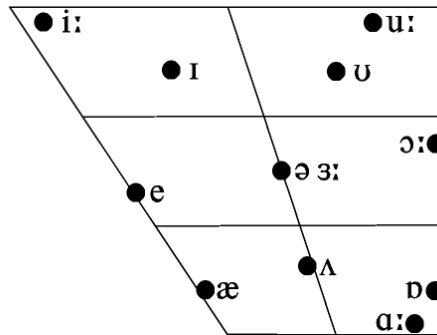


Figure 2. Daniel Jones' Diagram of the English vowel sounds (taken from Huckvale, 2017).

Compared to English, the Spanish vowel system consists of five sounds (see Figure 3). These sounds are also classified as high (/u, i/), mid (/e/, /o/) low (/a/); front (/i, e/), central (/a/) and back (/o, u/). The lack of corresponding sounds in Spanish of the English vowel sounds stated above makes their pronunciation more demanding. Some of the phonemes are equally represented in both Spanish and English, but it “does not imply that they are phonetically identical” (Yavas, 2005, p.183). A Spanish speaker may not appreciate the difference between some of the English sounds, for example, /ɪ/ and /i:/. According to Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 51) “the closest Spanish sound is more similar to a shortened /i:/”, therefore some time should be devoted to the pronunciation of these two vowel sounds, focusing on their length and quality.

The sounds /u:/ and /ʊ/ are also difficult for Spanish speakers to distinguish. On the one hand, regarding /ʊ/, “the nearest Spanish sound is more like a shortened /u:/, so students must learn to pronounce it with less rounded lips and lowering the tongue” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 56). On the other hand, /u:/ “is pronounced with the back of the tongue raised towards the soft palate, rounded lips and jaws quite close together” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 57). There is a similar sound in Spanish, however, some time should be devoted in class focusing on length and spelling, as it can cause confusion.

It may also happen that Spanish speakers cannot tell the difference between the words *wood/tool* or *ship/sheep*. This is because Spanish vowels do not differ in length, in contrast to English, in which vowels are also characterised by the length of their production.

Spanish speakers might also pronounce /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ equally, generalising to the Spanish /a/, which does in fact not coincide with any of the English sounds. Spanish /a/ is similar to the sound /ʌ/, so here the problem is related to spelling, which is often <u>. By comparison, in Spanish, there is no sound that is produced with the tongue in such a low position as in sound /ɑ:/. Therefore, Suárez Suberviola, (2006, p. 55), suggest to “pronounce it with the mouth open as if showing your throat to the doctor”.

The sound /ɜ:/ will entail further difficulty. Nearly all the words that contain that sound are spelled with vowel plus <r> (Suárez Suberviola, 2006), and the spelling does not correspond to the way it is pronounced. For this reason, when encountering the word *girl* most Spanish speakers, unaware of the correct pronunciation, would pronounce /gɪrl/ instead of /gɜ:rl/, changing a central vowel sound /ɜ:/ for a high vowel sound /ɪ/. In this case, Suárez Suberviola (2006) recommends making students memorise some of the words that contain the sound, such as “*girl, bird, word, world, turn, church, etc.*” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 53). Moreover, English /ɔ:/ is similar to Spanish /o/, but here again the problem is related to spelling.

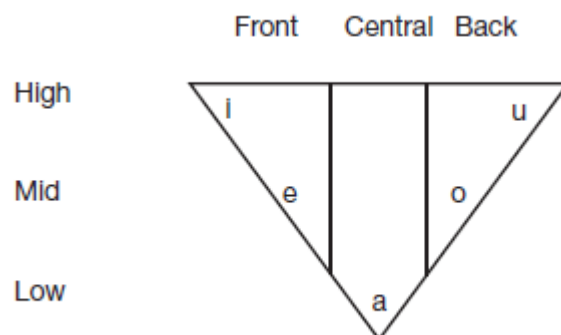


Figure 3. The Spanish vowel system (Salcedo, 2010, p. 199)

By contrast, the Catalan vowel system, is composed of seven vowel sounds /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /u/, /o/, /ɔ/, or eight if we add the sound /ə/ which is found in some dialects and variations found in the Balearic Islands (Wheeler, 2005; Recasens i Vives, 2014). Like in the English pronunciation, /ə/ vowel reduction occurs in Catalan unstressed vowels (i.e., vowels that do not have an accent mark). The sounds that can be assimilated are: /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/ /u/, /o/ /ɔ/.

According to Casanovas Català (1994), Catalan speakers are more prone to distinguishing the feature of openness in some vowel sounds, in contrast to Spanish speakers, who show more difficulties in making this distinction. The author further argues that in some cases Spanish interferes negatively in the process of making this distinction of the vowels (Casanovas Català, 1994). Additionally, Spanish speakers do not make a distinction between stressed and unstressed <o>, while in Catalan there would be a distinction causing a different sound /o´/ or /ɔ/, found in the words *dóna* “woman” and *gros* “big”, respectively.

As presented above, Spanish, Catalan and English vowel sound systems differ both in quality and quantity. The Spanish system contains fewer vowel sounds than the Catalan and the English do. Additionally, the length and the degree of opening are more varied in Catalan and English, than they are in Spanish. Accordingly, Catalan speakers should have less difficulty in producing the English vocalic sounds, in opposition to Spanish speakers, who will have to create a new sound different from the ones that are present in their mother tongue.

Consonant sounds are also challenging in learning EFL pronunciation. The sound /r/ is present in English, Spanish, and Catalan. However, in English this sound is characterised for being “postalveolar frictionless continuant” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 66), as opposed to the Spanish (and Catalan) <r>, which “has two contrastive rhotics or r-sounds: a tap (*vibrante simple*) as in *caro* [...] and a trill (*vibrante multiple*), as in *carro*” (Hualde, 2005, p. 181). Students producing the sound /r/ in English might produce a stronger sound than they should, especially in initial position (e.g. in the word ‘rude’).

According to Yavas (2005, p. 181), the target sounds /v, dʒ, ʒ, ð, ʃ, z, θ/ will also be problematic for Spanish learners, because they do not have these sounds

in their phonetic system. The author further claims that in Spanish, “/ð/ and /d/ are allophones of the same phoneme” (Yavas, 2005, p. 181). Hence, when they encounter the letter <d> they will normally use the Spanish and Catalan sound /d/ instead of /ð/, which involves the teeth in its production. For example, when trying to pronounce the phrase “there are” Spanish and Catalan speakers will say /der ar/ instead of /ð/ like in /ðeə a:/ (British English) or /ðer ar/ (American English). Basically, because the Spanish allophone appears between vowels and /r/ (Selinker, 1992). Moreover, Spanish sounds /d/ and /t/ are dental, in contrast to the same sounds in English, which are alveolar (Cámara, 2012, p. 62). Another feature of the English sounds /t/ and /d/ is that in final position, the liberation of air is not audible (Cámara, 2012, p. 63).

Contrary to Spanish, Catalan includes all the sounds mentioned above, except for the sound /ð/. The speakers of this language will make a distinction between /b/ and /v/ whereas Spanish speakers will generalise the pronunciation to the sound /b/, being that sound the only phoneme for letters <b> and <v>. Therefore, Catalan speakers should be more successful in the pronunciation of the minimal pairs *very* and *bury*. Likewise, Catalan speakers will make a difference between the sounds /s/ and /ʒ/, while Spanish speakers will have to practise it in order to produce it properly.

The position of a sound in a word or a phrase is an extra difficulty in the pronunciation of certain words by speakers of a different L1. In Spanish the only sounds that can be placed at the end of a word are /s, n, r, l, d/ whereas in English all sounds except /h/ can appear in final position (Yavas, 2005). Spanish and Catalan speakers tend to find difficulty in the pronunciation of regular past tenses and so they would pronounce the word *passed* /pasɪd/ instead of /pa:st/, and *asked* /askəd/ instead of /ɑ:skt/.

Another sound to be considered is the sound /dʒ/. This sound does not exist in Spanish although it does exist in the Catalan phonological system. For example, in the words *platja* ‘beach’, *lletja* ‘ugly’ and *mitges* ‘halves’ one can find this sound, specifically in the clusters <tj, tg>. That is why, more often than not, Spanish speakers will use their L1 sound /tʃ/ which is voiceless compared to the voiced target sound /dʒ/. As a result, Catalan speaking students might find that



the production of the English sound /dʒ/ like in the word *judge*, is easier in comparison to Spanish speakers, because of the lack of this particular sound in their L1. Similarly, some speakers would produce the sound /j/ instead of /dʒ/ in the English words *job*, *January* or *Japan*, and /tʃ/ instead of /dʒ/ in words such as *judge*.

Another problematic area would be that of voicing. English consonant sounds have different realisations according to the position in the word. For instance, “in English word-initial /p t k/ are realized as aspirated [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] [and they can] also occur word internally on the onset of stressed syllables” (Hualde, 2005, p.149). Spanish and Catalan speakers will probably ignore this aspiration when producing words such as *parking*, *appeal* or *pot*, which will lead to confusion with /b d g/ (e.g. *pier* misinterpreted as *beer*) (Hualde, 2005, p. 150)

Finally, another sound to be considered is /l/. While it is always light in Spanish, in English and Catalan there are two allophones of /l/ : light [l] and dark [ɫ] (Hualde, 2005, p.178), as in the examples “let” (light) and “tall” (dark) in English; *pel·lícula* “film” and *sal* “salt” in Catalan.

Once this contrast between languages has been established, the differences between languages suggest that there are quite a few elements that hinder Spanish and Catalan speakers from achieving a native-like pronunciation. Nonetheless, and because the aim of working with pronunciation is intelligibility rather than ‘perfection’, by establishing a routine and a regularity in the learning process, students can surely acquire a better pronunciation with time.

In this section, all the elements that interfere in the process of learning the pronunciation of a language have been presented. It can be argued that the difference between place and manner of articulation from one language to another is an obstacle in the achievement of a ‘correct’ pronunciation. Similarly, the opening of the mouth and the position of the tongue and the lips can also be a struggle for EFL learners. For these reasons, it is of the highest importance to help students learn how and where the sounds are produced in order to improve their pronunciation.

## 4. Material and Method

### 4.1 Participants

A total of 26 students between the ages of sixteen and seventeen (students of 1<sup>st</sup> of *Bachillerato*) take part in this study, with their previous consent. Most of the students have had EFL lessons since primary school. The subjects are students from IES Bendinat. Located in an area with a high presence of foreign population, this high school is known for its multiculturalism and multilingualism. Accordingly, the students of this high school have varied linguistic proficiency.

The four main languages one can encounter in this high school are Spanish, Catalan, English, and German. The variety of languages spoken in this high school is also an additional factor that may condition their oral production. For this reason, the results will be collected separately according to the students' L1.

The 26 students taking part in this study are divided into two groups (Group A and Group B). Group A consists of 16 students, whereas in group B there are 10 students. Group A will be the experimental group, while Group B will serve as a control group. As far as this study is concerned, they have not received formal instruction on English pronunciation before. EFL lessons in Spain tend to pay more attention to other skills than to speaking, despite the current curriculum. Moreover, as extracted from the academic results, the level students should reach by the end of secondary education is not always achieved.

The students taking part in this study are beyond that period since they are between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, which seems to justify the *fossilisation* of several linguistic features. Some of the students receive extracurricular lessons in English; however, these lessons tend to focus more on writing, grammar, and vocabulary rather than on conversation and speaking skills. The average level of English is not very high, which can justify the students lack of knowledge on English pronunciation.

## 4.2 Design and method

The methodology of this study consists of a pre-test pronunciation test, functioning as an awareness-raising tool; a sequence of training sessions, ending with a post-test pronunciation test. The training sessions include different tasks in which pronunciation will be practised both explicitly (using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a key tool) and other tasks integrating pronunciation practice through interactive and audiovisual material. Among the activities there are discrimination exercises, repetition activities, listening to authentic language material, reading exercises as well as running dictations. The activities have not all been personally created; a compilation from different sources has been made of activities tackling pronunciation according to different approaches (explicit and implicit pronunciation instruction).

On the one hand, Group A will attend several lessons which will include speaking practice. Additionally, they will practise their pronunciation explicitly in class through different activities. Hopefully, at the end of the study, there will be enough evidence on the usefulness of practising pronunciation both ways. On the other hand, Group B will attend regular lessons, in which pronunciation is hardly tackled.

It is both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative because the results will show the ability of students to pronounce properly a series of sentences in English, and quantitative because the amount of coincidence of mispronunciation among students will determine the sounds which are more challenging. Students will have a pronunciation test before the beginning of the sequence of lessons (pre-test) and one test after the sequence (post-test). This pronunciation test consists of a set of 10 sentences (see Appendix A). Students will have to read the sentences while being recorded. Additionally, this test will be supported by a questionnaire aimed at providing a general overview of the attitudes towards pronunciation and of the teaching and learning of pronunciation in this high school.

Throughout the training sessions, drilling and repetition are present because of their relation to language learning, and they seem to have a positive effect on the improvement of students' pronunciation. And, as Harmer (2007, p.

56) claims, “it is repetition which really helps fix things in the mind”. Each time students come across a new sound or word it should be repeated that day and over a period of time. By doing this, students will finally remember them. Moreover, the more words the students get to know, the better they will communicate with others.

#### 4.2.1 Questionnaire

In order to collect data regarding students’ attitudes and other general facts on the learning of English pronunciation in their high school, a questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed and conducted with the same students who provided the samples of the pronunciation test. As it was voluntary and anonymous, the number of students answering the questionnaire was twenty-one. The questions were designed to provide a general overview of the learning and teaching of English pronunciation in their high school.

In the preceding sections, some of the main factors that condition the acquisition of good pronunciation skills have been presented. Therefore, the questions regarding attitudes towards English pronunciation, language interference, pronunciation instruction in EFL lessons and the preference towards a specific type of instruction will be examined according to the data gathered from the questionnaire.

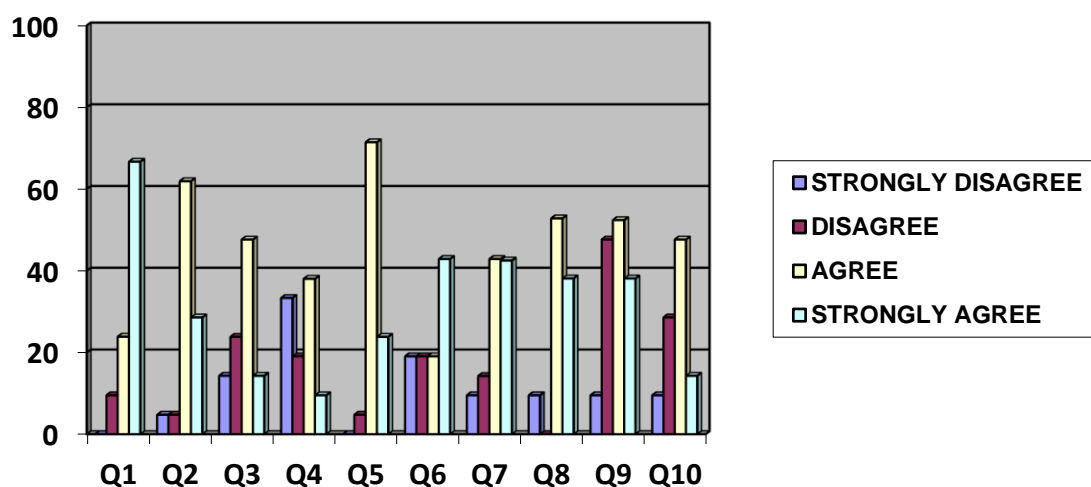


Figure 4. Results from the questionnaire on EFL pronunciation

**Question 1 (Q1):** *It is important for me to have a good English pronunciation*

**Question 2 (Q2):** *I want to improve my English pronunciation.*

**Question 3 (Q3):** *I think English is very difficult to pronounce.*

**Question 4 (Q4):** *I use Spanish pronunciation when I speak in English.*

**Question 5 (Q5):** *I think we should devote more time to pronunciation in class.*

**Question 6 (Q6):** *I did not know the International Phonetic Alphabet until now.*

**Question 7 (Q7):** *I think that knowing the International Phonetic Alphabet can help me improve my pronunciation.*

**Question 8 (Q8):** *I think it is very useful to practise pronunciation in the English lessons.*

**Question 9 (Q9):** *I prefer practising pronunciation using the International Phonetic Alphabet (symbols).*

**Question 10 (Q10):** *I prefer practising pronunciation without using the International Phonetic Alphabet.*

As extracted from the data, a high percentage of the students consider that having good English pronunciation is important (Q1, 66.67%). Moreover, nearly the same number of students shows a positive interest in the improvement of their pronunciation (Q2, 61.90%). Attitude is one of the main factors that condition the process of learning a language. Therefore, it should be noticed that despite showing a defective pronunciation in the pronunciation test, the students have a positive attitude and agree on improving their English pronunciation (61.9%). However, a considerable number of students agreed that English is difficult to pronounce (47.62%).

When it comes to social and linguistic context students' L1 plays an important role. When asked if they used Spanish pronunciation when they spoke in English, most of them agreed with the statement (Q4 38.10%) followed by a 33.3% (Q4) of students strongly disagreeing with the statement. This could be because some students were native, and others had a higher proficiency, however, as the questionnaire was anonymous, it cannot be surely stated. Despite this uncertainty, linguistic interference seems to have a great impact on their pronunciation.

The amount of practice in relation to students' linguistic proficiency is a key factor in that the more the students practice a particular sound the greater the possibility of achieving a correct pronunciation. A high percentage of the respondents consider that more time should be devoted to practising pronunciation in class (71.43%), supporting the need for introducing pronunciation instruction in secondary EFL lessons.

When asked whether they were acquainted or not with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), 42.86% claimed that they did not know IPA until the beginning of this study, in comparison to the average percentage of 19.05% equally distributed among the other possible answers. In relation to this, students believe that they can benefit from learning how to use and read IPA (see Q7 in Figure 4) and they embrace the idea of practising pronunciation in EFL lessons.

When asked if they preferred working with IPA or working implicitly with pronunciation, the data suggests that there is no tendency towards a particular approach being the percentages similar in both Q9 and Q10 (see Figure 4).

All in all, the questionnaire provided some useful insights into the matter of pronunciation teaching in this particular high school as well as students' attitudes towards the learning of English pronunciation. On the basis of the data obtained it could be evidenced that a need for improvement in terms of pronunciation teaching is extremely necessary. According to the answers gathered from the questionnaire, other skills take priority over oral production in EFL classrooms, and the students claim that there should be (more) pronunciation instruction in their English lessons. Moreover, there is a preference towards implicit learning of pronunciation, maybe due to the lack of knowledge on the use of the IPA.

## **5. Didactic Proposal**

There is a logical way in which pronunciation should be taught. For instance, and according to the difficulties encountered by Spanish students when facing English pronunciation, this instruction must include a set of steps in which the difficulty is gradually increased. In the following section, a series of activities will be presented in order to provide an overview of the materials used throughout the

sequence of lessons that are part of the training sessions of this study. The activities presented below are part of a didactic unit. Nonetheless, they can be extended to the annual programming by varying the target sounds.

As far as pronunciation instruction is concerned, there are several ways to tackle pronunciation in class. Sometimes it can take the whole lesson, or “some teachers insert short, separate bits of pronunciation work into lesson sequences” (Harmer, 2007, p. 251). The selected activities are not supposed to take a whole lesson, but it can happen that in some groups they can take longer than in others. This is why it is necessary to adapt the activities to the age and group features in which they are going to be practised.

To assess students’ first pronunciation execution in the pre-test pronunciation test and their potential progress and performance in the post-test pronunciation test, two rubrics will be given as an assessment tool (see Appendix C). During the lessons, pronunciation will not be dealt with in isolation, but it will be integrated into the content of that specific unit. Rather than providing innovative material, the lessons will consist of activities which have proven to have positive effects on students’ pronunciation. By creating a set of useful activities and materials it would be easier for teachers to deal with pronunciation regularly in EFL lessons and to build a routine, which is an essential aspect in foreign language learning.

Pronunciation and phonetics are complex areas which require a series of steps to be taught. It should start by the smallest units of language (i.e. letters and sounds) and end with more intrinsic elements such as stress and intonation. First of all, the teacher should provide the students with a description of each sound, that is, how this sound is produced, and which organs are involved (Suárez Suberviola, 2006). To continue working with pronunciation, it is important to work with “phonetic transcription and most common spellings” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p. 49). Students’ ability to work with minimal pairs and transcription will improve with practice, which means that phonetics is not a part of a language that can be tackled once in a while.

At first, students might not be capable of distinguishing the phonemes, but with practice, they will get used to the symbols. To ease the process, some words

can be presented exemplifying each symbol. Again, this is a skill that needs to be developed with time. When dealing with students with different L1s, as is the case of the context that is being taken as reference, it would be useful to establish the differences and similarities between the pronunciations of the two languages. On the one hand, Daniel Jones' diagram presented above could be useful to present students with the sounds and show them the way the vowel sounds are produced according to the opening of the mouth and the positioning of the tongue. On the other hand, when working with consonants, students should be taught how all the sounds are produced, that is, the teacher needs to explain the different manners and places of articulation, presented in section 3.1. Once students start to get familiar with the sounds and the symbols, the activities can be more varied and interactive.

The following pages will present useful and updated materials, both adapted and taken from the referenced sources. The activities serve to justify the effectiveness of working with pronunciation (both implicitly and explicitly) regularly in EFL lessons.



<b>Activity 1.</b> Introducing the English sound system	<b>Year Group:</b> 1st of Bachillerato	
<b>Skills:</b> Oral production and oral understanding (Blocks 1 & 2 of the curriculum)	<b>Grouping:</b> individual	<b>Duration:</b> 30'
	<b>Activity:</b> identification and production of English sounds	
<b>Objectives:</b> to get acquainted with IPA / to practise pronunciation/ to identify English phonemes and sounds / to understand authentic audio material	<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, repetition	
<b>Introduction:</b> The teacher (T) starts the class by telling the students (SS) they are going to work on English pronunciation. To gather information on previous knowledge T asks SS what they know/if they know what IPA stands for. T asks SS if they know the difference between vowel and consonant sounds. Some time will be devoted for SS to give their answers. After that, T will give a brief explanation of the difference between the two. Note: the difference is obstruction of air.	<b>Resources:</b>  Digital board Internet Access Audiovisual material	
<b>Activities:</b> T shows SS a video in which a native speaker presents the English sound system and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Through the presentation of each phoneme, the speaker goes through every sound, starting with the vowels and finishing with the consonants. While the speaker produces each sound, the T stops the video and makes the SS repeat what they have heard and seen. T corrects if necessary. Once finished, T draws a table on the digital board. At the top, the T chooses 2 or 4 phonemes and writes the corresponding symbols. As it is a beginners' class, the phonemes can be /ɪ/ vs. /i:/ and /u:/ vs. /ʊ/. T writes a word containing each sound as an example. T writes a list of words on the board, SS have to guess what word goes with the different sounds.		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity serves as an introduction to English phonetics. Repetition is useful to make students aware of how the different sounds and produced. Watching a person producing the sound is useful to help them producing them.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if students start at least to be familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet and the English sounds		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to produce the sounds in English will be part of a continuous assessment. A rubric can also be used.	<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic, cultural awareness and expression	
<b>Note:</b> This activity does not need to take the whole session. As it is a new unit, the vocabulary of that unit can be transcribed by the T on the board and SS can try to read them out loud. To SS with a higher level, the phonemes and words can increase in difficulty.		

<b>Activity 2.</b> Working with songs	<b>Year Group:</b> 1st of Bachillerato	
<b>Skills:</b> Oral understanding, oral production, written comprehension and written production (Blocks 1, 2, 3 & 4 of the curriculum)	<b>Grouping:</b> individual	<b>Duration:</b> 10'
	<b>Activity:</b> identification and production of English sounds	
<b>Objectives:</b> to practise with IPA / to practise pronunciation/ to identify English phonemes and sounds / to understand native speakers/ to infer the sounds adapting their previous knowledge		<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, inference
<b>Introduction:</b> The T tells the SS they are going to work with songs. T hands out the worksheet which contains the lyrics of a song with some gaps which have, instead of the original words, their phonetic transcription. T gives SS a few minutes to read the lyrics.		<b>Resources:</b>  Digital board Internet Access Audio material Worksheet
<b>Activities:</b> T plays the song and SS have to write down the spelling of the missing words. This can additionally be supported by asking SS to spell the words (to see if they have written the words correctly). The song can be played twice. This activity is engaging as it uses a song (some students might already know the song) to work with phonetic transcription.		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity is interactive and engaging, and rather than being just transcription, it implies SS abilities to infer the symbols they do not know.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if students guess (nearly) all the words that are missing in the lyrics.		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to produce the sounds in English will be part of a continuous assessment. Moreover, the ability to apply previously learnt content can be assessed with the aid of a rubric.		<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic, cultural awareness and expression.
<b>Note:</b> This activity does not need to take the whole session. It can be inserted in the lesson when considered.		

<b>Activity 3.</b> Pronunciation maze	<b>Year Group:</b> 1st of Bachillerato	
<b>Skills:</b> Oral production, oral understanding and written comprehension (Blocks 1, 2 & 3 of the curriculum)	<b>Grouping:</b> whole class/pairs	<b>Duration:</b> 30'
	<b>Activity:</b> identification and production of English sounds	
Objectives: to practise pronunciation/ to practise reading /to identify sounds and phonemes / to expand students' vocabulary / to infer the sounds adapting their previous knowledge		<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, interference
<b>Introduction:</b> T can either display the maze on the digital board or bring a printed version for the SS (see activity 1 in Appendix D).		<b>Resources:</b>  Digital board Internet Access Audiovisual material Worksheet
<b>Activities:</b> SS have to find a way from START to FINISH, by identifying the words containing a particular sound.		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity is both useful for practising vocabulary and pronunciation, and it can help the T see what words SS (not) know.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if students get from START to END by identifying the sounds.		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to identify the sounds in a series of words will be assessed as a part of a continuous assessment (also with the use of a rubric).		<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic, cultural awareness and expression
<b>Note:</b> T can prepare some boards with different sounds and SS can work in groups or pairs.		

<b>Activity 4.</b> Silent mouthing (or lip-reading)	<b>Year Group:</b> 1st of Bachillerato	
<b>Skills:</b> Oral understanding, oral production and written comprehension (Blocks 1, 2 & 3 of the curriculum)	<b>Grouping:</b> pairs	<b>Duration:</b> 20'
	<b>Activity:</b> identification and production of English sounds	
<b>Objectives:</b> to practise pronunciation/ to practise sound production (place and manner of articulation) to practise reading / to identify sounds and phonemes / to broaden students' vocabulary /to infer the sounds adapting their previous knowledge		<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, interference
<b>Introduction:</b> This activity is aimed at practising manner and place of articulation, by focusing on the visible features of sound production and further discrimination between sounds (Hewings, 2004)		<b>Resources:</b>  <b>Digital board</b> Internet Access Audiovisual material Worksheet
<b>Activities:</b> T can either display a video in which a native speaker produces a sound or pronounce it himself/herself. SS have to write down the word they believe the T or the speaker is saying.		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity is engaging because students need to observe a person producing a sound and they have to identify that particular sound. The ability to identify a sound by the way it is produced will help the SS improve their own pronunciation.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if students are able to identify the sounds properly.		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to recognise the sounds in English will be part of a continuous assessment. Using the rubric is also recommended.		<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic, cultural awareness and expression
<b>Note:</b> T can exaggerate the production of the “silent” sounds, so the SS can get the sounds more easily.		

<b>Activity 5.</b> Guess the sound	Year Group: 1st of Bachillerato	Date:
<b>Skills:</b> Oral production, oral understanding and written comprehension (Blocks 1, 2 & 3 of the curriculum)	Grouping: pairs	Duration: 10'
	Activity: identification and production of English sounds	
<b>Objectives:</b> to practise pronunciation/ to practise sound production (place of articulation and manner)/ to practise identifying sounds and phonemes / to infer the sounds adapting their previous knowledge		<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, interference
<b>Introduction:</b> This activity is useful to practise place and manner of articulation. By working in pairs, it fosters peer work and collaborative work.		<b>Resources:</b>  Worksheet Mirror or similar
<b>Activities:</b> T tells SS to make pairs. One of the Student (S) has to read a brief explanation (see activity 2 in Appendix D) referring to the production of a sound. The other S has to follow the instructions given by his/her classmate. T can give SS a mirror so they can see they are doing it properly. Once the sound has been produced. Both have to guess what sound the explanation/description is referring to		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity is interactive and engaging. SS must guess the sounds by the way they are produced. Hence, it focuses on SS abilities to produce the sounds properly, rather than on its transcription.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if SS manage to guess all the sounds being described.		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to produce the sounds in English is part of a continuous assessment. Moreover, the ability to apply previously learnt can be assessed with a rubric		<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic, cultural awareness and expression.
<b>Note:</b> SS can use a mirror to look at themselves while producing the sounds. Previous knowledge will be crucial to the correct production of the sound being described.		

<b>Activity 6.</b> Pronunciation card game	<b>Year Group:</b> 1st of Bachillerato	Date:
<b>Skills:</b> Oral production, oral understanding, written comprehension	<b>Grouping:</b> pairs	<b>Duration:</b> 20'
<b>Activity:</b> identification and production of English sounds		
<b>Objectives:</b> to practise pronunciation/ to practise vocabulary / to identify sounds and phonemes / to infer the sounds adapting their previous knowledge	<b>Points to Remember:</b> previous knowledge and varied linguistic background, interference	
<b>Introduction:</b> This activity is useful to practise pronunciation in a more interactive way. SS practise vocabulary and phonemes through a game similar to “Go fish”, which consist of the players asking for cards and if the opponent does not have the asked card the player has to take a card from a pile placed in the middle of the table.	<b>Resources:</b>  Cards	
<b>Activities:</b> T hands out a deck of cards to every pair of SS. In each deck, there are 20 cards with some words written and 20 cards with a phoneme appearing in the corresponding words. Each of the SS must start the game with 5 cards, and the rest of the cards will be placed in a pile in the middle of the desk. Student (S) 1 asks S2 if he/she has got a word that corresponds to a sound and must produce that sound. S2 answers whether he/she has got that word or not. If not, S1 must take one card from the pile. When finding the corresponding pair, the cards will be out of the SS hand and put on the desk. And so until there are no cards in the pile. The more pairs of cards a S has, the more points he /she gets.		
<b>Conclusion</b> This activity is an alternative way of practising pronunciation. Students enjoy playing with their classmates while they practise vocabulary and the phonemic symbols.		
<b>Success Criteria:</b> The activity will prove successful if one of the students finishes without cards.		
<b>Assessment Methods:</b> The participation and their ability to produce the sounds in English will be part of a continuous assessment. Moreover, students’ ability to retrieve previous knowledge on vocabulary and sounds will be considered in the progress of improving their pronunciation.	<b>Key Competences:</b> Linguistic, social and civic	
<b>Note:</b> This activity does not need to take the whole session. To SS of higher levels, the phonemes and words can increase in difficulty.		

## 6. Results and discussion

The introductory activity is probably the most necessary one to include in EFL lessons. It helps to raise awareness on the English sounds and it is an initial approach to IPA symbols and the process of sound production. Moreover, it is a first step towards the learning of the different places and manners of articulation. However, the lack of linguistic proficiency expressed by the students is a drawback regarding the pronunciation of some of the sounds.

With regards to IPA transcription, it is important to state that it was the first time most of the students worked with this tool. Therefore, it was introduced systematically throughout the lessons. One way of doing it is by providing the students with words that contain a specific phoneme, so they can start to relate and identify words with sounds. The activity in which students had to complete the lyrics of a song was very successful since they were able to identify all the missing words. This may be because they already knew the lyrics or because they were able to infer the word by its transcription. It should be noticed that the activities at this level cannot be too demanding, otherwise students will lose interest in them.

The pronunciation maze validated the importance and usefulness of using games<sup>1</sup> in EFL lessons. They worked with spelling and pronunciation in an implicit way, focusing on sounds and enriching their vocabulary. However, some of the students were not aware of the way some words were pronounced and they found it difficult to arrive at the end of the game. Likewise, the card game is an engaging way of practising vocabulary. This activity was aimed at helping students pronounce and identify sounds in words, but this time they used cards and they worked in pairs.

The remaining activities are potentially beneficial for students' pronunciation skills. Because of the unawareness of the production of certain sounds in English, the focus should be placed on the way the sounds are produced. Therefore, lip-reading and word guessing are activities that can help

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<sup>1</sup> Hall (2016, p.142) defines *gamification* as "the process of integrating gaming techniques into learning environment"; aimed at motivating and engaging students in the learning process.

students develop their pronunciation skills by learning how to produce the sounds properly. The use of a mirror is highly advisable as students can see how they are producing the sound, that is, they can see the shape of the mouth, feel the position of the tongue and see whether the teeth are involved or not in the sound they are pronouncing.

As far as students' pronunciation is concerned, the results extracted from the audio samples prove that despite the short period covered in the study, students have experienced an improvement when it comes to reading the sentences out loud. This is closely related to the idea that language is designed for those who know it. That is, once students have been in contact with certain words and sounds they can relate that idea in their minds to the letters and words they are reading.

After the first sample was taken, students were given feedback on what sounds they had more difficulty with. This feedback, together with the phonetic transcription of the sentences, gave the students the necessary tools to improve the pronunciation of, at least, the words appearing in the respective sentences.

Pronunciation errors can be easily identified; however, the assessment of pronunciation skills is not a problem-free process. For this reason, the two rubrics provided in Appendix C are useful tools in order to assess the initial test as well as the progress and improvement in relation to students' pronunciation. As extracted from the data from the pre-test pronunciation samples, most students had serious pronunciation errors. The pre-test samples proved also the students' lack of adequate linguistic baggage, despite being in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of non-compulsory secondary education and have therefore studied English since the age of six.

According to the first rubric (see Appendix C), most students did not know some of the words of the sentences, which led to pronunciation errors. On some occasions, it was difficult to understand what they were saying. In addition, students felt nervous and this feeling affected negatively their performance. Almost all students produced more than four errors when pronouncing consonant sounds and more than six errors when pronouncing vowel sounds. Intelligibility was negatively affected by these errors, as there were several mistakes related



to vowel quality and consonant production. Some of them were developing a good proficiency while just a few achieved the label of “accomplished”.

Regarding the post-test samples, while some students had experienced a high level of improvement, others had not reached the desirable level. Most of the students had improved in relation to the vowel and the consonant sounds dealt with in class, which supports the idea of introducing more practice in EFL lessons.

The second time students had to read the sentences, they were more confident as they already knew the words that appeared on the sheet. Sometimes students do not perform well because of a lack of confidence in their speaking abilities. That is why they should practice more speaking in class: presenting projects, speaking with their classmates, etc.

The most challenging EFL sounds are significantly related to the differences found between the Spanish, Catalan, and English sound systems, and mostly related to negative transfer. In the following chart, some of the most frequent pronunciation errors produced by the students are presented:

<b>What students say</b>	<b>How the word is pronounced in English</b>
<i>Girl</i> /gɪrl/	/gɜ:rl/
<i>Crossed</i> /krosed/	/krɒst/
<i>Truck</i> /truk/	/trʌk/
<i>The</i> /de/	/ðə/
<i>World</i> /world/	/wɜ:ld/
<i>Job</i> /job/	/dʒɒb/
<i>Underground</i> /underground/	/ʌndəgraʊnd/
<i>Closure</i> /klosur/	/kləʊzə/
<i>Loved</i> /loved/	/lʌvd/
<i>Caused</i> /kauset/	/kɔ:zd/
<i>Theatre</i> /θeatrɛ/	/'θiətə/
<i>Good</i> /gut/	/gʊd/
<i>Food</i> /fut/	/fu:d/
<i>Pocket</i> /poket/	/pɒkɪt/

<i>Halloween</i> /xalowɪn/	/,hæləʊi:n/
<i>Very</i> /bɛrɪ/	/vɛri/
<i>These</i> /dɛs/; /dɪs/	/ði:z/
<i>Women</i> /womɛn/	/wɪmɪn/
<i>Sure</i> /sur/	/ʃɜ:ʔ/ (UK)
<i>Early</i> /ɛrɪ/	/ɜ:li/

Figure 5. Relevant pronunciation errors extracted from the audio samples of the pre-test pronunciation test.

Most pronunciation errors can be easily associated to instances of negative transfer, previously presented in section 3.2. According to this analysis, one could predict the errors students were going to make when reading the sentences of the pronunciation test. As foreseen by the analysis, there are several ways in which the L1 the students have a negative effect on their English pronunciation.

English has been previously characterised by its complex connection between spelling and pronunciation. That is why some of the errors of the pre-test audio samples are directly linked to students' inability to identify the words (and their pronunciation) correctly. For this reason, according to the data gathered from the analysis of the post-test samples, it can be assumed that students are more familiar with the words they are reading.

That is why, as stated in the chart, some of the students, unaware of the correct pronunciation, pronounce the word 'girl' like / gɪrl/ and 'theatre' like /θɛatrɛ/. Additionally, consonant clusters and word endings in regular verbs have also been presented as a difficult aspect for Spanish and Catalan speakers, therefore in the pronunciation of the words 'loved', 'crossed' and 'caused' they also pronounce the vowel sound /e/ in between the last two consonant sounds. The results of the test show that Catalan speakers have a greater ability to identify and produce vowel sounds than Spanish speakers. For example, in the words "caused", "girl" and "bird".

The lack of a particular sound in a speaker's L1 is another factor that interferes in the learning process. Glottal sound /h/, for instance, does not exist

in the Spanish variety spoken in Majorca. For this reason, students tend to have problems when pronouncing words starting with /h/, producing an incorrect sound: /x/. This is also the case of /dʒ/ which does not exist in the Spanish phonological system and is therefore produced as /j/ in the case of “job” and “just”. However, there have been cases in which the students have produced the sound /dʒ/ in words where it was not necessary, for example in when pronouncing the word “younger” some of the students have said / dʒʌŋə/ instead of /jʌŋə/.

Surprisingly, the word “happiness” and “theatre” have been a cause of confusion in the pronunciation test. “Happiness” has been sometimes pronounced like “Chinese” / tʃaɪni:z/, and “theatre” has had different kinds of pronunciations: from /eɪtrɪ/ to /eetre/. Additionally, the <h> has also been pronounced like /x/ by some of the students.

When it comes to comparing Catalan and Spanish speakers in relation to their English pronunciation there are some cases in which Catalan speakers get closer to the English pronunciation. That is the case of the sounds /ə, ʒ, dʒ/ for example. The difference between /s/ and /ʒ/ is nearly undetectable in the production made by Spanish speakers, whereas Catalan speakers tend to produce it more easily and therefore they are able to distinguish the two consonant sounds. The results suggest that most students produce the sound /j/ instead of /ʒ/, however, this replacement “does not interfere with communication” (Suárez Suberviola, 2006, p.64).

Regarding word ending, students have had difficulty in pronounced words ending with -ed. such as loved and caused. In which students have added a vowel sound in between the two consonant sounds /vd/ and /zd/. Additionally, when facing a word ending with <t> and <d>, students tend to make a final sound, /t/ and /d/. As stated before the release of the air when pronouncing these letters is not supposed to be heard in final position. Sound /r/ did also confusion in the students, who pronounced “red” with a trill instead of a trap, causing a stronger sound.

The data gathered from the post-test samples indicates that pronunciation practice in EFL lessons has a positive effect on students’ English pronunciation. The words “girl”, “theatre”, “bird”, “underground”, “bury” and “Halloween” are

examples of words that have been better pronounced the second time, that is, after the sequence of lessons. The fact that students pronounce better the words in the post-test samples contributes to the necessity of fostering reading habits among students. The more they come across a word, the better the sounds can be identified.

The amount and quality of the input is also a variable that affects not only students' pronunciation but also their whole linguistic competence. Therefore, in EFL lessons, teachers should be able to provide students with authentic and useful material in order to help students in the process of improving the way in which they pronounce the words in English. Moreover, students should devote more time to speaking and having 'real' conversations in class, not only listening and repeating the contents that are prepared in their textbooks.

As far as the control group is concerned, no evidence of improvement in relation to the challenging sounds has been found in the results. However, post-test samples show a slightly corrected pronunciation of some of the words. This fact supports the idea that the more input the students receive, the better they can identify the words and sounds.

Most students found the sentences difficult to read and were not familiar with many of the words written on the test sheet. That is why EFL teachers should reinforce the value of good reading habits and introduce more reading material in class. This does not necessarily mean that students have to read every day in class, but that building regular habits when it comes to reading and speaking is crucial in order to be fluent in a language.

The responsibility, however, is not only on the students. Most teachers have not had formal instruction on pronunciation teaching in their degrees. It is true that (at least at the University of the Balearic Islands) there is a course in phonetics and phonology, but this is not enough for a teacher to be able to prepare activities and lessons suitable for any level. Therefore, it is advisable that some reference to the different methods used to teach English pronunciation to learners of other languages is made in their training courses.

Some of the reasons why these errors are present in students' pronunciation have been stated according to previous contrastive analysis.

However, for more detail, they could be further clarified according to the field of error analysis. The pronunciation errors that can be gathered from the audio samples are not always errors that have a negative impact on intelligibility. Therefore, with practice, they can become less evident.

## **7. Conclusions and future lines of research**

The current curriculum focuses on students' skills and competences. As presented above, there are several competences among which one can identify the linguistic competence. This competence has been of interest in this study as it is referred to as the ability of students to communicate with others in a variety of situations. However, according to the data collected, students are not able to speak adequately in English; at least the ones participating in this study.

Pronunciation and phonetics have been established as key elements that construct a language. Accordingly, as students have shown a lack of knowledge on this subject, when working with pronunciation in EFL lessons, more emphasis should be placed on how the different sounds are produced, and the way words are pronounced, mostly because of the lack of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation in English result in a difficulty encountered by students who are not aware of the English sound system. Moreover, focusing explicitly on symbols and phonemes can help students understand the way words are pronounced; by focusing on place and manner of articulation they can be aware of the parts that intervene in the process of producing a particular sound.

The lack of correspondence between English spelling and its pronunciation is a major factor that affects students' pronunciation. Students with poor linguistic baggage are more prone to have a defective pronunciation than students with more knowledge of the language. Moreover, the students' low proficiency has a negative effect on the way they pronounce the sounds. To detect a possible negative transfer from students' L1 to the L2, a contrastive analysis has been convenient in that it presents the areas in which the two languages are similar or different from one another. It is also useful to predict and solve possible difficulties in foreign language acquisition. That is why the

contrastive analysis made between Spanish, Catalan and English has been useful to identify and tackle challenging sounds.

The problem of students' defective pronunciation stems from the lack of pronunciation instruction in their EFL lessons. Therefore, the activities carried out during the training period have had a great impact on some of the students' pronunciation. There is evidence, though, that students need more input in order to identify better the English sounds and words.

To recapitulate the findings, the results show that the pronunciation of the students taking part in this study is highly influenced by a negative transfer from their L1. Most features tackled in the comparison made between Spanish/Catalan and English sounds appear in the errors students make when pronouncing some English words. The similarities between the languages would imply a better ability to pronounce correctly a particular sound.

When it comes to teaching pronunciation, teachers are constrained by the lack of instruction they receive on the subject. Therefore, additional instruction should be provided in teacher training courses in order to enhance the quality of their teaching in relation to English phonetics and phonology.

All the points raised by the research have been discussed in relation to the effect they have on the development of students' English pronunciation. A lack of correct instruction does not only interfere in the way students read a particular text, but it also has a negative effect on the way they communicate in English; which is (or should be) the ultimate goal of EFL lessons.

The results of the study provide enough evidence that the benefits of practising pronunciation in class outweigh completely the possible drawbacks a teacher might come across in the process. The success of the activities carried out during the training lessons corroborates the statement of this study, which suggests that students can benefit from both explicit and implicit pronunciation instruction in secondary education EFL lessons.

Pronunciation needs to gain importance in the area of EFL teaching as, according to the results, the combination of explicit and implicit pronunciation in EFL lessons prove to have a positive impact on students' pronunciation skills. Moreover, the emphasis paid on pronunciation throughout the training sessions

has shown that little attention was paid to it before this period; otherwise, students would have shown better competence in the field.

In this work, the importance of pronunciation in EFL lessons has been the focus of the study. Despite the limited number of participants, it can be extracted that student's pronunciation has improved as a result of the training sessions. The methodology used in this study is, and can be, used by researchers and teachers to identify pronunciation errors in students' speaking and find ways to eradicate these errors.

The analysis carried out in this work is one of the many analyses that can be done with audio samples. Future lines of research may focus on suprasegmental features as it would be useful in order to create material that focused on aspects such as stress and intonation. In addition, some research can be done on the different approaches present in Spanish education in relation to speaking practice in EFL lessons. The list of sentences presented in the pronunciation test contains some of the most challenging English sounds and can be used by students or teachers to practice pronunciation and reading. An analysis of the acoustic properties of the sounds can also be carried out with students in order to get more detail about their speech.

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## **9. Appendices**

### **A. Pronunciation test.**

1. The girl said thank you with pleasure.
2. The red truck crossed the tracks early.
3. I wouldn't be so sure.
4. I eat good food.
5. There are a lot of women in the world.
6. I have three arrows in my pocket.
7. Push the door.
8. Do you like fashion?
9. Park the car in the underground parking lot.
10. I loved cheese when I was younger.
11. The birds fly worse in winter.
12. I just have a nice job for you.
13. I bury the chocolate very deep in Halloween.
14. Happiness is a rare thing these days.
15. Yesterday, the blasts from the bomb caused a closure of the exit from  
the theatre, trapping forty people inside

## B. Questionnaire

**1. It is important for me to have a good English pronunciation.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**2. I want to improve my English pronunciation.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**3. I think English is very difficult to pronounce.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**4. I use Spanish pronunciation when I speak in English**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**5. I think we should devote more time to pronunciation in class.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**6. I did not know the International Phonetic Alphabet until now.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**7. I think that knowing the International Phonetic Alphabet can help me improve my pronunciation.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**8. I think it is very useful to practise pronunciation in the English lessons.**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**9. I prefer practising pronunciation using the International Phonetic Alphabet (symbols).**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**10. I prefer practising pronunciation without using the International Phonetic Alphabet (symbols)**

- Strongly disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

### C. Assessment rubrics

- *Pre-test pronunciation assessment*

	1. Poor	2. Developing	3. Accomplished	4. Proficient
<b>General pronunciation</b>	Several serious pronunciation errors. Lack of vocabulary leads to mistakes in pronunciation.	Some pronunciation errors.	The speaker makes very little pronunciation errors.	Very good pronunciation with no errors.
<b>Intelligibility</b>	It is very hard to understand what the speaker is saying.	There is some difficulty in understanding the speaker.	Nearly everything is understandable.	Fully understandable speech.
<b>Consonants</b>	More than four identifiable errors in the production of consonants.	Less than four errors in the production of consonants.	Almost no errors in the production of consonants.	No identifiable errors in the production of consonant sounds.
<b>Vowel quality</b>	More than six identifiable errors in the production of vowel sounds.	Less than six errors in the production of vowel sounds.	Almost no errors in the production of vowel sounds.	No identifiable errors in the production of vowels.



- *Post-test and progress assessment*

	<b>1. No evidence of improvement</b>	<b>2. Some improvement</b>	<b>3. High level of improvement</b>
<b>General pronunciation</b>	The speaker shows no evidence of improvement in the pronunciation of the given sounds, despite the training sessions.	There is evidence of a process of improvement in the speaker's pronunciation after the training sessions.	All the errors committed in the pre-test are rectified.
<b>Intelligibility</b>	There is still the same difficulty in understanding the speech as in the pre-test sample.	There is less difficulty in understanding the speech in the post-test sample.	There is quite a difference between the pre and the post-test samples when it comes to intelligibility.
<b>Consonants</b>	The problematic consonant sounds are still challenging for the speaker and they are equally pronounced in the pre and post-test samples.	Some of the consonant sounds are corrected, but not all.	All the errors identified and worked on in the training sessions have been corrected.
<b>Vowel quality</b>	The vowel sounds identified as challenging in the pre-test are still a problem for the speaker in the post-test samples.	Some of the vowel sounds are better produced in the post-test than in the pre-test, although there are still some problematic sounds.	The speaker shows excellent improvement in the production of the vowel sounds tackled in the training sessions.

## D. Selected activities

### 1. Pronunciation maze. Taken from Hancock, M. (2003) *English Pronunciation in Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.21&43

6.3 Find a way from Start to Finish. You may pass a square only if the word in it has the sound /i:/. You can move horizontally (↔) or vertically (↕) only.

START					
leave	earth	health	reach	teach	meat
dream	dead	cream	jeans	steak	cheat
east	bread	tea	death	heat	peak
beach	break	peace	search	leaf	meant
seat	please	team	early	beat	bean
head	bear	wear	dreamt	sweat	clean
FINISH					

7.1 Find a way from Start to Finish. You may pass a square only if the word in it has the sound /θ/. You can move horizontally (↔) or vertically (↕) only.

START					
north	northern	either	weather	breathe	those
south	bath	bathe	thought	breath	youth
southern	third	their	through	though	thumb
Thailand	cloth	path	fifth	with	worth
month	clothes	these	brother	that	teeth
throw	thing	author	other	they	wealth
FINISH					

## 2. Guess the sound

Sound description <sup>2</sup>	Corresponding sound
It is a plosive consonant. To produce this sound, you have to put your lips together. The soft palate is raised to prevent the air from getting out until it's time to 'explode'. It is a voiceless consonant.	/p/
It is an affricate consonant. That means that it combines features of plosives and fricatives. It is a mixture of two consonants. It is voiced. To produce this sound, you have to make a closure like in a plosive and then release the air, causing friction by narrowing the space between the front of the tongue and the hard palate.	/dʒ/
It is a fricative voiceless sound. To produce this sound, you have to place your lower lip in contact with your upper teeth. These two organs are close together, causing friction.	/f/
It is a palato-alveolar fricative voiced consonant. To produce this sound, put the tip and blade of the tongue on the alveolar ridge. Raise the front towards the hard palate.	/ʒ/

<sup>2</sup> Descriptions adapted from Suárez Suberviola (2006, p. 60-66)

### 3. Pronunciation card game<sup>3</sup>

/əʊ/	row
/ʌ/	blood
/i:/	sheep
/ɜ:/	television
/ɛ:/	word
/dʒ/	George

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<sup>3</sup> Examples extracted from the deck of cards.