Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras

TRABAJO DE DIPLOMA

EL PERFECCIONAMIENTO DE LA PRONUNCIACIÓN DE LAS CONSONANTES MÁS DIFÍCILES DEL INGLÉS EN LA ESCUELA PRIMARIA

Autor del trabajo: Vladimir Espinosa

Tutor del trabajo: Dr.C. Bertha G. Salvador

Santa Clara, Junio 2019

Foreign Languages
Department

DIPLOMA THESIS

IMPROVING THE PRONUNCIATION OF TROUBLESOME ENGLISH CONSONANTS FOR CUBAN LEARNERS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Author: Vladimir Espinosa Delgado

Adviser: Dr.C. Bertha G. Salvador Jiménez

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank all those people: teachers, classmates, students and my family, who have been involved in the development of this research.

Special thanks to my advisor and my wife for who have taught me how to be a better professional

Thought:

> *You cannot solve a problem on the same level it was created,*
>
> *You have to rise above it to the next level.*
>
> *Albert Einstein*

ABSTRACT:

English subject is in the curriculum of every level of education in Cuba, and hence, in Elementary Schools. One of its main objective is to develop speaking in a fluently way, as fluency will effect on the success of communication. During the academic year 2018-2019, the author carried out a research in order to find out the main problems in the teaching learning process of English at "Benito Juarez" elementary school

The author noticed that the most affected ability in 6th grade students was speaking and, more specifically, pronunciation as an important component, were the students´ pronunciation regarding troublesome English consonant sounds was the main troublesome area. At that point, he decided to use some activities in order to have 6th graders improve the pronunciation of such difficult consonant sounds. The idea was presented to an informal group of discussion who agreed that it is a very important research topic.

In this paper, the author searches different ways to address this problem. Therefore, it was necessary to carry out an action-research study. During the process, qualitative and quantitative procedures were combined in order to get a reliable data that permitted the authoress to assess the real situation regarding students' vocabulary. This paper provides teachers of English with a useful booklet of activities as a tool to help them develop the students' pronunciation regarding troublesome English consonant sounds. The main transformations were not only in the students' pronunciation of such difficult consonant sounds but also in the students' interests toward English

Résumée

La matière anglaise est au programme de tous les niveaux d'éducation à Cuba et, par conséquent, dans les écoles élémentaires. L'un de ses principaux objectifs est de parler couramment, car sa fluidité affectera le succès de la communication. Au cours de l'année universitaire 2018-2019, l'auteur a mené une recherche afin de déterminer les principaux problèmes rencontrés dans le processus d'apprentissage de l'enseignement de l'anglais à l'école élémentaire "Benito Juarez". L'auteur a remarqué que la capacité de parler des élèves de sixième année était la capacité la plus touchée et que la prononciation était un élément important de la prononciation. À ce moment-là, il a décidé d'utiliser certaines activités pour que les élèves de sixième année améliorent la prononciation de ces consonnes difficiles. L'idée a été présentée à un groupe de discussion informel qui a reconnu qu'il s'agissait d'un sujet de recherche très important.

Dans cet article, l'auteur cherche différentes façons de résoudre ce problème. Il était donc nécessaire de mener une étude de recherche-action. Au cours du processus, des procédures qualitatives et quantitatives ont été combinées afin d'obtenir des données fiables permettant à l'auteure d'évaluer la situation réelle du vocabulaire des élèves. Ce document fournit aux enseignants d'anglais un livret d'activités utile qui les aidera à développer la prononciation des étudiants en ce qui concerne les sons de consonnes anglais gênants. Les principales transformations concernaient non seulement la prononciation par les étudiants de ces consonantes difficiles, mais aussi leur intérêt pour l'anglais.

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the teaching of English as a foreign language is a real need all over the world, and Cuba is not an exception. The main reason is the great importance that it has acquired as a means of communication among all the countries of the world. English is considered a strong instrument to keep up with information technologies. The extensive English language training of huge populations has been an official linguistic policy in different nations. It has been widely recognized that learning foreign languages brings opportunities, enhances employment potential, helps in personal development, builds friendships, breaks down cultural barriers, and improves understanding among people.

In Cuba, English is learned as a foreign language. It is used both in written and oral communication. To be able to speak fluently becomes one of the goals of English learners as fluency will effect on the success of communication. Therefore, English has been included in the curriculum at every level of education in Cuba so the teaching of such language must not only focus on the linguistic aspects, but also on the basic abilities that allow effective communication.

Learning English in Cuba is very difficult because students should develop the four skills: speaking, writing, listening and reading in a non-native context, which means few contacts with native and limited feedback. However, speaking is the main communicative ability to be developed, from Elementary School to University and, undoubtedly, one of the most affected.

Such a skill requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary, but also that learners understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (Suárez y Martin, 2005; quoting (Brown, 1994 & Burns & Joyce, 1997). Many specialists like Harmer (2012) and Paul Tench (1990) have made emphasis on the great importance of pronunciation. As Tench (1989) states: "Pronunciation is itself a complex of sounds (consonants, vowels and diphthongs), syllables (word accent and rhythm) and intonation, and each element needs attention (p. 6). Nevertheless, pronunciation turns out to be a very troublesome area in language learning.

During the previous school year (2017-2018), the author and two of his classmates carried out a research at "Viet-Nam Heroico" elementary school in order to find out what the main problems in the teaching learning process of English were. By means of participant observations, they noticed that the most affected ability in 3rd grade students was speaking and, more specifically, pronunciation as an important component. The authors also noticed that students tended to pronounce words the same way as they are written and that they had some problems with the pronunciation of different consonant sounds like /θ/, /h/, /z/, /ð/ and the /s/ in initial and final positions.

In the current school year (2018 – 2019), the author carried out a similar research at "Benito Juarez" elementary school. By means of observation, he noticed that the most affected ability in 6th grade students was speaking and, more specifically, pronunciation as an important component. The author noticed pronunciation problems similar to those found last year: students tend to pronounce words the same way as they are written and they make mistakes in the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds like /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /θ/, and /z/. At that point, he decided to use some of the activities designed last year in order to have 6th graders improve the pronunciation of such difficult consonant sounds, but they continued making mistakes.

The author analyzed the reasons why his students faced such difficulties and he realized that this situation could be given to several causes. First, there is only one class period during the week. Second, some students are not motivated towards the study of the English Language. Third, there is a lack of exercises on the pronunciation of some of the troublesome consonants.

As a result, some ideas emerged in order to provide a solution to the situation. The objective is to help children pronounce the consonant sounds that have proved to be troublesome for them.

The ideas were presented to a group discussion and the author talked about the participant observations, in which it was noticed that the most affected ability in 6th grade students is speaking and, more specifically, pronunciation. After some

discussion, the group agreed that it is important to continue researching on the topic and that the problematic situation demands action research by the teacher of English.

The author deepened into the students' strengths and weaknesses in the pronunciation of consonants and on the causes of the problems, in which he used the observation of lessons and the analysis of documents such as the 6th grade workbook and the syllabus for sixth grade. The author realized that the main weaknesses are in the pronunciation of consonant sounds that do not exist in the student's native language and the causes might be varied. The students' motivation towards learning English language is weak. There is a graphic interference when pronouncing words. In addition, there is a lack of systematic practice in, and out of class, and the exercises on pronunciation that appear in their workbook are not enough. Students need a variety of exercises that focus on pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds. Through peer observation, the author also recognized that there are good interpersonal relations among the students in the classroom, since students enjoy pair and group work activities, which would really favor the practice of troublesome consonants.

This reality shows that the teaching of pronunciation of consonant sounds that appear in the syllabus needs improvement.

Pronouncing consonants correctly is very important because consonant sounds make speech clear, crisp and intelligible; that is, they make speech easier to understand. Different books, web sites and previous researches have been consulted in order to find a scientific solution to the current situation.

Some of them are *A Training Course for Developing Academic Linguistic Competence in Foreign Language Teacher Education* (Salvador, 2006), *Teaching Pronunciation Communicatively*, (Naiman, 1989), *Essential Teacher Knowledge* (Harmer, 2012), *Compilation of Materials of Foreign Languages* (Camacho, 2005), *Pronunciation Skills* (Tench, 1990).

Some previous investigations that deal with the topic of the teaching and learning process of pronunciation were also consulted, such as Ynfiesta (2015-2016), Betancourt (2015-2016), and Águila (2015-2016).

The existent problematic situation leads to the following **scientific problem:**

How should teachers contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds in the teaching learning process of English to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school?

Object of research: The teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school.

Objective: To build up a scientific result that contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds by 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school.

Scientific questions:

1. What theoretical and methodological judgments support the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school?

2. What is the current situation regarding the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds by the students from 6th grade at Benito Juarez elementary school?

3. What changes should be introduced in the teaching learning process of the English at "Benito Juarez" elementary school that might contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of troublesome consonants by 6th graders?

4. What transformation take place in the in the teaching learning process of English in the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds in 6th graders after implementing the changes at "Benito Juarez" elementary school?

5. What scientific result emerges from the research process that might contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds by 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school?

Scientific tasks:

1. Determining the theoretical and methodological judgments that support the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English

consonant sounds to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school.

2. Diagnosing the current situation regarding the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" Elementary school

3. Planning the changes that could contribute to the improvement of the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds to 6th grade students from "Benito Juarez" elementary school.

4. Assessing the transformations that occurred in the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds after implementing the changes of at "Benito Juarez" elementary school

5. Elaborating the proposal that emerged from the action-research process.

Subjects of research

This research was carried out in a group of twenty students from 6th grade at "Benito Juarez" elementary school. This group was chosen because it is the group where the author does his practicum; that is, the group was selected intentionally.

Scientific methods

The current research is carried out through action- research. The author followed Thomas S. C. (2007) cycle of investigation. The cycle encompasses the following steps: (1) identify an issue, (2) review literature on issue and ask questions to narrow focus of issue, (3) choose method of data collection, (4) collect, analyze and interpret information, and (5) develop and implement and monitor action plan.

Theoretical and empirical methods were used in order to gather, organize and process information; whereas percentage analysis as a mathematical method is used to analyze and process the information gathered. Along the process, qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures are combined.

From the theoretical level, four main methods were used. *The logical – historical* method was applied to reveal the history and tendencies of the teaching of pronunciation in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). *The analytic – synthetic* method was used during the study of the problematic situation, the study of different

ways of developing the pronunciation of difficult consonant sounds in the students and in the processing of the resulting data from the application of the different instruments. *The inductive – deductive* method helped the study of the strengths and weaknesses of the students in relation to the development of the pronunciation of difficult consonant sounds and of the general and particular theoretical considerations expressed by different specialists on learning process of English pronunciation and in the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through the different instruments applied. *Systemic approach* was used to explain the systemic character of the whole process of investigation.

From the empirical level, different methods and techniques were used, which provided the direct practical contact with the research object and the reflection on the process of implementation of the proposal. These methods and techniques were *analysis of documents*, *participant observation*, *interview*, *pedagogical test*, *learning research journal*, and *triangulation*. They are explained in detailed in 2.2 (third step).

From the statistic level, the **p**ercent analysis was used to back up the data obtained in the diagnosis phase and in the evaluation of students´ transformations during the building up process.

The considerations and opinions of the informal group of discussion were taking into account along the whole process of research in order to improve the investigation and choose the best ways of developing this study.

Practical contribution

This paper provides teachers of English with a booklet of exercises that will help them during the teaching learning process of the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds to 6th grade students at "Benito Juarez" elementary school.

Structure of the paper

This paper is structured into three parts: introduction, discussion and conclusions. The discussion is subdivided into two headings. The first heading is the theoretical and methodological foundations and the second one is the process of building up the proposal in an action research process. After the conclusions, some suggestions, the bibliography and annexes are included.

DISCUSSION

1. **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS THAT BACK UP THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH CONSONANT SOUNDS COMMUNICATIVELY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

1.1 English teaching in Elementary School in Cuba

The English subject, within the national education system, is an innovative answer to the political, economic, social, and cultural significance of foreign languages in today´s world. Such subject stimulates creativity and imagination, and it is common to create learning situations for authentic communicative purposes. Audiovisual materials such television, videos and softwares may contribute a lot in this direction.

In Cuba, English is taught since elementary education, taking advantage of the fact that children can learn foreign languages easily, as experience proves in many other parts of the world, where children grow up speaking two or more languages (Camacho, 2003). English syllabus in Elementary School lays the foundation for the students to go on learning English in junior and senior high school.

"The teaching of English in elementary education in Cuba aims at preparing students to communicate orally and in writing at an elementary level, and at the same time instruction should help as a means of strengthening values that may favor the establishment of cultural ties with the English-speaking countries, by studying some of their customs and traditions". (Betancourt, B. 2015-2016, p-3)

The teaching of English in 6[th]grade has several objectives. According to the syllabus (2014), the students should be able to:

> - Ask and answer simple questions about content or topics studied in class
> - Be able to talk about family situations, school, and their home by using common expressions and simple words
> - Be able to write three or five sentences about family topics by following a model
> - Follow instructions in the classroom
> - Be able to read poems and rhymes, and sing songs appropriated for their ages

- ➤ Be able to understand narrations, stories or fragments of stories appropriate for their age by using visual aids, through nonverbal answers, or in Spanish
- ➤ Develop and use different language-learning strategies that favor comprehension, for example:
  - To imitate words and sounds in English
  - To repeat sounds and words after the teacher
  - To recognize cognate words
  - To use gesture, actions, context. Etc. to infer meaning
  - To listen carefully and participate actively in the activities assigned
  - To practice the reading of easy rhymes and sing easy songs
  - To seek help through repetition
  - To practice and use the alphabet
- ➤ Demonstrate moral values and an appropriate social behavior in the classroom when participating in activities and interacting in a foreign language

In order to fulfill the previous aims a communicative approach is followed. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach includes new ideas, concepts and techniques that improve students' learning, and make teachers' work more effectively. It also gathers the strengths of previous methods used in foreign language teaching. CLT is a flexible approach, whose main goal is to attain communicative competence.

Communicative competence consists of four components, which together suggest a model of communicative competence as a basis for classroom practice. They are (1) linguistic or grammatical competence, (2) sociolinguistic competence, (3) discourse competence, and (4) Strategic competence. (Águila, D. 2015-2016).

Grammatical competence refers to the degree to which the language user has mastered the linguistic code; and includes knowledge of vocabulary, rules of pronunciation and spelling, word formation, and sentence structure. Sociolinguistic competence addresses the extent to which grammatical forms can be used or understood appropriately in various contexts to convey specific communicative functions. Discourse competence involves the ability to combine ideas to achieve

cohesion in form and coherence in thought. Strategic competence involves the use of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to compensate for gaps in the language user's knowledge of the code or for a breakdown in communication for other reasons. (O`Maggio, 1986 referring to Canale and Swain, 1980 and Canale, 1983; quoted by Camacho, 2016).

To achieve such level of communicative competence in the students, the CLT approach has some principles that guide classroom practice. Specialists such as Keith Morrow and Neil Naiman (1989) have defined these principles and Alfredo Camacho (2003) redefined them. In the present paper, the researchers follow the CLT principles restated by Camacho as they are contextualized considering the educative needs of Cuban students. The principles are:

- ❖ Classes should be active and centered on student´s educative needs, interests and experiences.
- ❖ Materials, tasks, activities and resources should be chosen on the basis of educative and linguistic criteria, and should be provide for learning and acquisition.
- ❖ Practice should be carried out through meaningful tasks, which engage students in thinking and activity.
- ❖ Practice should provide for strategy development.
- ❖ Students should be engaged in monitoring, self-correction and self-evaluation tasks; they must be as well asked to question and reflect on what they have learned and how they have learned it.
- ❖ Opportunities should be given to learn content from other areas of the curriculum through the medium of English.
- ❖ Practice should engage students in cross-cultural comparison.
- ❖ Classes should foster an atmosphere of co-operation and open communication among students and teacher.

On the roles assumed by teachers, Richards and Rodgers on their book *Approaches and Methods in Languages Teaching* (1999) pointed out that:

"CLT teacher assumes a responsibility for determining and responding to learner language needs. This may be done informally and personally through one-to-one sessions with

students, in which the teacher talks through such issues as the student´s perception of his or her learning style, learning assets, and learning goals. It may be done formally through administering a needs assessment instrument, such as those exemplified in Savignon (1983). (…) On the basis of such needs assessments, teachers are expected to plan group and individual instruction that responds to the learners' needs" (p.167).

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), pronunciation has always been present in language teaching curricula. There have been two basic groups of approaches: (listen and repeat) and the analytic-linguistic approaches (analyze and understand)

1.2 Pronunciation in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Learning a language is learning a skill that implies the mastery of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. However, it is not a matter of memorizing some grammar rules and vocabulary. Students should understand ideas and concepts, use that information in speaking, listening, writing, and reading, understand non-verbal gestures, cultural symbols and rituals, global trends, regional varieties of language, and local traditions and contexts, and attain some intelligibility in pronunciation.

Undoubtedly, pronunciation is the most troublesome language component in foreign language learning. Some researchers state that it makes learners speak with a foreign accent, but some others state that pronunciation problems are solved by using appropriate approaches, methods and procedures. It is indeed a very controversial issue in language teaching and learning.

The importance of including pronunciation into English classes to improve the intelligibility of students' language is well established both theoretically and empirically. It can be integrated and combined with other communicative activities and reinforced in all classes. This would help students achieve communicative competence in English and improve their comprehensibility.

Today, the most prominent teaching method is Communicative Language Teaching, which, as stated previously, emphasizes that the main purpose of language teaching is to help students learn to communicate. To do this, they need intelligible pronunciation; that is, "The goal of teaching pronunciation to learners is not to make them sound like native speakers of English. With the exception of a few highly gifted

and motivated individuals, such a goal is unrealistic. A more modest and realistic goal is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate" (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 8).

In the process of learning a foreign language, students find some similarities between or among languages, which in many cases are the result of historical or cultural contacts (...) Therefore, language teachers should be aware of both the similarities and the differences between or among the languages their students know or are learning. It is not only a matter of having certain knowledge of the students mother tongue and the foreign language but also of being aware of the similarities and differences between the foreign language they are teaching and any other language previously studied by the students" (Salvador, 2006, p. 118).

The author of this paper believes that students need to acquire an intelligible pronunciation in which pronouncing consonants correctly is very important because consonant sounds make speech clear and easier to understand. The author also thinks that teachers should be aware of the similarities and the differences between the languages their students know or are learning and recognize troublesome sounds for learners.

1.3 The consonant sounds of English: most troublesome consonants for Spanish speakers of the Cuban variant

Speaking English is very important for Cuban learners, but they make many mistakes in the pronunciation of consonants because they need to learn seven new consonant sounds that are troublesome for them.

The most troublesome consonants for Spanish speakers of the Cuban variant are:

/dʒ/- a palato - alveolar, voiced, affricative as in <u>George</u>

/ʃ/- a palato – alveolar, voiceless, fricative as in <u>she</u>

/v/- a labio – dental, voiced, fricative as in <u>have</u>.

lθl- a dental, voiceless, fricative as in <u>thing</u>, <u>breathe</u>

/z/- an alveolar, voice, fricative as in <u>buzz</u>

/ʒ/- a palato – alveolar, voiced, fricative as in <u>television</u>

/r/- retroflex, voiced sound as in <u>room</u>, <u>war</u>

Some other consonants are troublesome in certain positions. These are the cases of /s/ in initial and final, and most consonants in final position.

The syllabus for 6th grade only encloses four out of seven troublesome consonant sounds; namely /dʒ/, /ʃ/, lθl, /z/. English language teachers should be aware of the need of paying special attention to such sounds. (*Villate & Rodriguez, 1987, p. 112*). However, there are sounds that are not in the syllabus but the author finds worthy to make the students practice the rest of the troublesome consonants in order to prevent mistakes in further years. In order to do this, several exercises should be designed in order to practice consonant sounds like /v/, /ʒ/ and /r/ and students' performance should be evaluated systematically.

1.4 Testing the pronunciation of consonants

One of the most important reasons for testing is to give a learner a report on the progress he/she has made toward the attainment of goals. Other reason for testing is to set realistic standards for the students and schools; but testing is dedicated not only to evaluate knowledge and award grades, but also, and probably more important, to motivate students to be sensitive to evaluation of their English . Given that, the motivation of many students for learning English is instrumental rather than integrative, pronunciation tends to be neglected by many learners as long as they know they will not be tested on it (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1989).

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the focus on accent and on accuracy instead of on intelligibility has been detrimental to the development of the teaching of pronunciation. Intelligibility has been a key factor for discriminating between levels. The focus is on how much effort is required from the interlocutor to decode the speaker's message.

Although, our ultimate goal is intelligibility during spontaneous speech, for assessment purpose it is also critical to know whether learners can control their pronunciation during a communicative task when they are monitoring for specific features. In conclusion, the goal of testing is that students be able to understand and be understood in the communicative situation with ease and the ability to monitor their speech in order to make adjustments and improvements.

Teachers may want to test grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or other isolated items, or may want to test the capacity to communicate orally or in writing, or the capacity to process oral or written information. Depending on what teachers test, evaluation may be classified into two types: *Discrete-point test* and *Integrative or holistic test.* In the first type, traditionally teachers test individual language and cultural items. In the second type, they test competence, interactions, fluency, and appropriateness of what is social. (Garcia, 2010)

According to Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1989), there are several types of test. *Aptitude tests* are given before a person starts a program, to determine whether he/she will be successful in language study. *Proficiency tests* are used to measure what a person already knows in the target language. *Achievement tests* need to be used daily; weekly; after the completion of a unit, module; or at the end of the academic year to determine the degree to which the various enabling skills or terminal goals have been attained. *Diagnostic tests* are given to note the strengths, weaknesses or problems in some area of knowledge or skill.

Tests devoted exclusively to pronunciation are rare today; (much less common than tests dedicated to vocabulary and grammar) because pronunciation items can be evaluated only at the same time that listening or speaking. Deciding what to test depends on how advanced students are and on how accurate teachers think they should be. (*https://archiv.elearning.fpf.slu.cz*)

As it is stated in *Testing Techniques in Teaching Pronunciation of the English Language.* Hughes. H (2017) the ideal way of testing pronunciation is actually to listen to the learner. Nevertheless, there is a variety of ways to evaluate student's pronunciation of English; some of them are limited-response, multiple-choice hearing identification and reading aloud.

Limited response comprises oral repetition and hearing identification. Oral repetition is one of the easiest of all exams to prepare. No distracters are needed; no clever sentence frames are required, and no drawings need to be prepared. Moreover, every pronunciation feature can be tested. In fact, we can evaluate in a single sentence the pronunciation of key vowels and diphthongs, important consonants,

vowel reduction, word linking, consonant clusters, etc. These enable teachers to test students who cannot read yet. In addition, they do not mix reading comprehension and pronunciation. Hearing Identification is, strictly speaking, the ability to hear and identify various sounds, is a listening skill, but good pronunciation depends on how well we hear what is spoken. Therefore, items of hearing identification are included as one kind of pronunciation test. These can be simple enough for little children and adult beginners. For students that are just starting to learn a foreign language the use of visuals testing can emphasize the difference in meaning between words, which sound similar. In this way, Hearing Identification Tests can reinforce teaching.

Multiple-Choice Hearing Identification implies that Hearing-identification items can be used with students who are literate in their second language as well as with those who are not yet literate. In addition, students who can read some English may be evaluated by using multiple-choice hearing-identification items. These may be in either paraphrase or appropriate-response form.

One of the most important ways of testing pronunciation is to have students read something aloud. It is supplier of excellent control. However, there are several points when preparing reading-aloud items to keep in mind:

- Evaluate only one or two points per sentence. It is extremely difficult to be accurate and consistent when checking a number of things at the same time. Student progress in mastering specific sounds, stress and intonation can be tested more reliably if only one or two features are looked at per sentence
- Use natural language. While tongue twisters and rhymes may occasionally be used in class, our tests should reflect the ability to communicate in more natural everyday language.
- Avoid signaling the point being tested. Often a student can produce a sound correctly if he concentrates on it, but in normal speech he may not do so well. In order, then, to get an accurate measure of how students normally express themselves in English, it is best not to let them know the specific pronunciation point being tested in each sentence

The author supports the teaching of the English language to young learners by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR), which is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries.

Taking into account the CEFR, the subjects of research are starters (Young Learners) which means that they should be at a pre-level A1 with an elemental knowledge of the target language. The Pre-level A1 establishes:

- Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases, these phrases can be understood with some effort by interlocutors.
- Can produce correctly a limited range of sounds as well as the stress on simple, familiar words and phrases
- Can reproduce sounds in the target language if carefully guided.
- Can articulate a limited number of sounds, so that speech is only intelligible if the interlocutor provides support

1.5. The role of pronunciation in the teaching learning process of English: strategies and techniques

Pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features, but can also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds, showing were they are articulated in the mouth, making students aware of what words should be stressed help them improve comprehension and intelligibility. Whether teachers are aware or not, they are always teaching pronunciation by being themselves one of the main sources of input of the foreign language in the classroom. For a long time, teachers have used drilling as a way to teach and practice pronunciation (Tice, 2004)

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996:p295-7) and Wrembel (2001:p65-6) suggested several multisensory techniques; including:
- ✓ visual reinforcement through the use of visual devices;
- ✓ body movement or miming;
- ✓ auditory reinforcement through listening and repeating;

- ✓ tactile reinforcement through the use of props to demonstrate and reinforce features of the English sound system;
- ✓ and kinesthetic reinforcement with gestures and body movement;

Some of these techniques are reflected to a certain extent in Neil Naiman (1989:p163-9) proposal of way to improve pronunciation, which are explained below:

Listen and imitate

A technique in which students listen to a teacher and repeat or imitate the model provided. This technique has been enhanced by the use of tape recorders, language labs, and video recorders.

Information gap activities

A technique used to help students distinguish between similar and problematic sounds in the target language through listening discrimination and spoken practice . One of the easiest technique for practicing consonants and consonants contrast in a communicative way. This activity can be used if students are confusing in the pronunciation of contrast sounds like /b/ and /v/. The best way of using this technique is to put the students working in-group in a brainstorming exercise thinking in many words as possible, which contain this sounds, so they may be able to generate these words in a communicative fashion.

Matching exercises

Another way of practicing a sound contrast such as /b/ and /v/ involves the use of matching exercises. Divide the class into two groups. Group A has a written description of several people. Group B has a picture containing all of the people for which there are descriptions. The object of this activity is to match the written descriptions with the appropriate people.

Chain stories

Each student receives a phrase containing the sound contrasts to be practiced. The first student must embed that phrase in a short story (or string of related sentences) of no longer than four sentences. The task of the other students is to guess the embedded phrase based on the correct pronunciation of the relevant

sound or sound contrast. The next student continues the story using the phrase that he or she has received.

Rhymalogues

In Improving Spoken English, Joan Morley uses 'rhymalogues' as a way of practicing contractions and reduced expressions in a semi –communicative fashion. For example, students can work in pairs or in groups with one member of the pair asking a question and the other providing a response.

Dialogues and role-plays

Common reduced expressions such as 'gonna', 'wanna', 'hafta', 'shoulda', and 'coulda' can be practiced in dialogues and role plays. It is often necessary to provide students with models of such dialogues. When possible, these should be done with the students attempting to generate the dialogues and the teachers serving primarily as a resource person.

Games

Games such as Bingo and Tic-Tac-Toc can be used for practicing individual sounds and consonant contrasts such as the reduction of initial /h/ in the personal pronoun "he" can also be practiced.

Celce Murcia et al. (1996:p295-7) coincide with the previous techniques and add reading aloud recitation, visual aids, recordings of learners' production and tongue twisters this last technique is specially motivating while teaching young learners.

Reading aloud recitation

Passages or scripts for learners to practice and then read aloud, focusing on stress, timing, and intonation. This technique may or may not involve memorization of the text, and it usually occurs with genres that are intended to be spoken, such as speeches, poems, plays, and dialogues.

Visual aids

Enhancement of the teacher's description of how sounds are produced by audiovisual aids such as sound-color charts, wall charts, rods, pictures, etc. These devices are also used to cue production of the target sounds.

Recordings of learners' production

Audio and videotapes of rehearsed and spontaneous speeches, free conversations, and role-plays are included. Subsequent playback offers opportunities for feedback from teachers and peers as well as for teacher, peer, and self-evaluation.

Tongue twisters

A technique from speech correction strategies. Promotes pronunciation, provides exposure of certain different sounds, and drives students' motivation for good pronunciation. Especially useful in pronunciation when focusing on a specific, related phonemes, or sounds. For example in distinguishing phonemes /ʃ/ and /s / as well as producing distinct and accurate [l] and [r] sounds.

As it has been stated acquiring good pronunciation is teachers and students' goal. Therefore, teachers spend time considering appropriate ways of teaching pronunciation and developing students' skills. The majority of teachers use repetition technique to make the acquisition of English pronunciation easier and to helps students to become more familiar with pronunciation, easily and quickly.

Therefore, teachers need to be creative to teach and help students increase their ability in pronouncing English words. Teachers need to use a variety of methods in teaching pronunciation taking into account several factors, among them the age of the students. The author believes that while teaching pronunciation to young learners, some of the previous techniques are specially significant; namely, listen and imitate, information gap activities, chain stories, rhymalogues, dialogues and role-plays, games, visual aids and tongue twisters.

Tongue twisters are useful in learning pronunciation, and they are very helpful to improve students' pronunciation, not only practicing and pronouncing words, but also developing memory skills as well. For someone who speaks to a listener, working with tongue twisters to build on his/her phonemic awareness helps to develop better articulation and pronunciation of words. Practicing tongue twisters allows people who are learning English to strengthen their speech skills. The faster a person can say the tongue twister without slipping up, the stronger their language skills become.

A tongue twister is a specific sequence of words whose rapid, repeated pronunciation is difficult even for native speakers. It is a great way to practice and improve pronunciation and fluency. The subtle changes in the spellings make the words mean different, look different, and definitely pronounced different. The point of tongue twisters is to practice the mind and the tongue to make them coordinated.

Tongue twisters are not only meant to be fun and hilarious, but they also play a major role in child's language development. Many Speech Therapists recommend tongue twisters for kids enhance their speech development, such as:

- Tongue twisters strengthen and stretch the muscles involved in speech. This muscle exercise leads to clearer pronunciation and clearer speech patterns.
- They act as a Tool to Master the Second/ Foreign Language Pronunciation.
- Practicing the tongue twisters of the new language can help a child sound more like native speakers.

Tongue twisters are great for building fluency, practicing reading strategies, and having fun. It exposes you to different sounds and language. It shows you what words and sounds you have trouble with pronouncing. Tongue twisters also stretch and strengthen the muscles, which you use to speak. Many parents use tongue twisters as a learning exercise to teach their children how to speak correctly.

2. BUILDING UP THE PROPOSAL IN AN ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 General research strategy

As it has been stated in the introduction, the current research is carried out through action- research. According to Thomas S. C. Farrell (2007), action research generally involves inquiring into one's own practice through a process of self-monitoring that generally includes entering a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on an issue or problem in order to improve practice

Moreover, "… within second language education, action research has usually been associated with the study of classroom actions rather than addressing social problems associated with language teaching. Bailey (2001: p. 490) maintains that action research for language teachers is 'an approach to collection and interpreting

data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures". (Thomas S. C. Farrell, 2007, p. 94)

The author of this paper follows Lucena's scheme, who also adopted Thomas S. C. (2007) cycle of investigation in order to conduct an action research project. The cycle encompasses the following steps: (a) identify an issue, (b) review literature on issue and ask questions to narrow focus of issue, (c) choose methods of data collection, (d) collect, analyse and interpret information, and (e) develop and implement and monitor action plan.

The first step entailed defining the purpose and the topic, the focus, the product, the mode, the time and the resources. The second step consisted on reading some background literature on the topic, because reading about what others have discovered before can give teachers more ideas about how to conduct their own action research projects by following similar research methods or adapting the methods used for their own contexts. The third step dealt with planning and deciding on a strategy to collect data. The fourth step involved collecting, analyzing and interpreting information. The main purpose of this stage was to make meaning of data gathered in order to determine the value of the intervention and involved sorting through the data to discover important themes relating to the issue under investigation. Finally, the fifth step was aimed at developing, implementing and monitoring action plan.

Next, each step is going to be discussed in details.

2.2 The first three steps

First step

Identifying the issue

The process of identifying the issue allowed the author to address a problem related to the teaching of English to young learners, investigate on that issue, and decide that one of the most affected components was speaking which is the main communicative ability of an elementary level. Thus, throughout the observation and analysis of documents the author got to the conclusion that one of the main students' problems was related to the pronunciation of consonants.

Second step

Reviewing the literature on issue and asking questions

The second stage was the review of the literature on issue and the questions to narrow focus of issue. The author spend some time collecting and reading several books on English language teaching and pronunciation such as *A Training Course for Developing Academic Linguistic Competence in Foreign Language Teacher Education*(Salvador, 2006); *Essential Teacher Knowledge* (Harmer, 2012); *Compilation of Materials of Foreign Languages*(Camacho, 2005); Pronunciation Skills (Tench, 1990). The author also review previous investigations like Ynfiesta (2015-2016), Betancourt (2015-2016), and Águila (2015-2016) and websites like http://www.learninglifetoff.com,2015, http://learninglifeoff.com, Sandra Zimmer in order to find out information on the previous topics as well as on the characteristics of young learners.

Third step

Choosing the methods of data collection

In order to collect the necessary data for the research, different methods and techniques were chosen. They provided the direct practical contact with the research objects and the reflection on the process. These methods and techniques were analysis of documents, observation, interview, pedagogical test and triangulation.

The first method used was the *analysis of documents* in order to determine the treatment of pronunciation as presented in the official documents. There were reviewed the syllabus for 6th grade and the 6th grade workbook. To accomplish the objective, a guide was elaborated (Annex 1). The *observation* permitted to corroborate the most common mistakes during a speaking lesson, to diagnose the current state of the teaching of consonants in 6th grade, to notice when consonants are dealt with, the ways of teaching and learning consonants, the interactions during the lesson, and the way the teacher deals with the students´ mistakes. An observation guide was also elaborated (Annex 2). The *interview to the students* was applied with the objective of knowing students' opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of lessons and students likes and dislikes about the type of activities related to the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds (Annex 3). *The*

learning research journal consisted of regular dated accounts of activities and classroom occurrences and was used to record what happened during the lessons and the corresponding reflections on the part of the teacher (Annex 4). The *pedagogical test* was used to verify students' level of pronunciation within the teaching learning process of English at the very beginning (Annex 5). Triangulation, as a technique, permitted to compare and contrast the data and to identify the regularities after detecting the problem using the data collected through the different empirical methods.

2.3 Fourth step: collecting, analyzing and interpreting information

Once the data has been collected, the teacher then analyses and reflects on it and makes a data-driven decision to take some action. The main purpose of this stage is to make meaning of data gathered in order to determine the value of the intervention and involves sorting through the data to discover important themes relating to the issue under investigation

This step implies administering the instruments previously described to the subjects of research and making meaning of information gathered.

2.3.1 Characteristics of the subjects of research

The subjects of research are the 20 students from 6[th]grade at "Benito Juarez" elementary school. These students were selected because this is the group in which the author of this research does his practicum.

The average age of chosen subjects of research is 11 years old and their behavior corresponds to the psychological characteristics of this age.

The subjects of research are in the so-called pre-adolescence stage framed in the ages of nine to eleven years. They reach higher levels of reflexive learning; in addition, generalizations and abstract judgments are evident. Students in this stage can elaborate, interpret and discover large concentrations of words developing the student's language in both; oral and written form.

The attitude of the students towards the study is positive. They are always willing to learn, to know the surrounding world. They generally show a positive attitude towards

the process of assimilation of knowledge. Moral development is characterized by acquiring a higher level of cognitive activity towards reality.

These characteristics are of vital importance for the learning of English as a foreign language, since this learning process requires that the student understand the lexicon and the structures in the new language that the student studies; and it also requires the student to make inductions, deductions, Inferences and generalizations that contribute to the understanding of morpho-syntactic and semantic contents.

The subjects of research meet some of the features of young learners state by J. Hammer (2011) for instance,

- ✓ They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- ✓ Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear, and crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.
- ✓ They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp.
- ✓ They have a limited attention span, unless activities are engaging, they can get easily bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.
- ✓ They like puzzles, songs, games built around dialogues, question-and-answers activities and matching exercises.

On one hand, childhood is a beautiful period in the life, where every child needs guidance of parents and their teachers as well. Parents are involved in their children´s education because they want them to be successful adults. On the other hand, kids are curious by nature and it is the root of their successes. Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristic of a vigorous intellect, which is good for the brain. Young learners are creative. They love stories and they have a rich imagination and they always trust and believe what parents or teachers teach them. Moreover, they are emotionally sensitive and thus vulnerable, they are generally carefree and they forgive and forget quickly, and they are good at memorizing. (http://www.learninglifetoff.com, 2015 17/2/2019)

In fact, young learners from 6th grade at "Benito Juarez" elementary school are willing to learn in an adequate classroom environment.

2.3.2 Categories used along the research process

Three main categories were established to diagnose the current situation of the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds by 6th graders at "Benito Juarez" elementary school. Each category helped in the analysis and interpretation of data, these categories also encompass some key aspects or subcategories that help the analysis and interpretation of data. The last two categories were also used to assess the transformations that occurred in the teaching learning process of the English language while implementing the proposal of exercises.

Category 1: Guidelines to teach English consonants in Elementary School
- General objective of Elementary School
- Methods, techniques or procedures

Category 2: Students' performance regarding pronunciation of consonant sounds during the lessons.
- Students' attitudes towards the lessons
- Students' progress on the lessons
- Activities that students prefer in lessons

Category 3: Pronunciation of consonant sounds that do not exist in Spanish
- Production of different familiar sounds in context independently
- Production of different familiar sounds in context with teacher support

To evaluate the third category, the following scale was devised.

Evaluation scale

High (MB)
- Can produce correctly the consonant sounds that do not exist in Spanish in simple, familiar words and phrases independently.
- Rarely mispronounce

Intermediate (B)
- Can articulate the consonant sounds that do not exist in Spanish, so that speech is only intelligible if the teacher provides support (e.g. by repeating correctly)
- frequent errors

Low (R)

➤ Can articulate the consonant sounds that do not exist in Spanish with difficulties even with the help of the teacher.

➤ Almost unintelligible

2.3.3 Analysis of the results of the initial diagnosis.

Category 1: Guidelines to teach English consonants in Elementary School

Analysis of Document:

In order to know the guidelines to teach English consonants in Elementary School, the following documents were analyzed, 6th grade English syllabus and students' workbook.

The 6th grade syllabus includes educative and instructive objectives. The English learning goal is to make students practice and use the English language by means of several communicative functions that appear in 40 lessons. There are guidelines for the treatment of pronunciation in the different units, including some related to the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds.

The students' workbook has many exercises to develop the speaking ability and most of the exercises ask the students to complete dialogues, charts, do role-plays. Many of the exercises should be improved by the teachers because they do not express an actual communicative situation. There are not many exercises devoted to the practice of pronunciation.

In conclusion, the exercises regarding pronunciation that appear in the workbook are not enough; the students need a variety of exercises that focus on pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds. Most of the exercises are designed for developing grammar and writing; the rest aims at practicing speaking skill and expanding vocabulary. The contents of the exercises on pronunciation are in correspondence with the students' ages and interests and they are organized in relation to the communicative functions.

Category 2: Students' performance regarding pronunciation of consonant sounds during the lessons

Interviews to the students:

Students were interviewed in order to assess their opinions about strengths and weaknesses regarding the teaching learning process of English language pronunciation. The process of interviewing the students was carried out in the classroom and students´ behavior was good along the whole process.

In the interview, the students said that English subject is very important because it helps them to communicate with people from other countries. They also said that in spite of being highly motivated they consider that English is not among their priority. The majority of them expressed that they have problems when pronouncing troublesome consonant sounds like lθl in words like thanks, thin, /z/ when they pronounce the days of the week and lvl in very important words like in words like voices and evening.

Students also stated that they rarely do or practice exercises devoted to pronunciation in class because most of the exercise in the workbook and text book is about writing or speaking.. Finally, they wanted to practice more in their English lessons in order to improve their pronunciation.

Participant observation:

In terms of lesson delivery, it was observed that most of the students were motivated because they participated spontaneously. The main difficulties are in 12 students (60%), who do not pronounce correctly the sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue, sounds in words like: thanks, very, picture, three.

Category 3: Students' mastery of English consonants

Participant observation:

In order to corroborate the problem detected on pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds that is affecting the students from 6th grade at "Benito Juarez" elementary school during a lesson, the participant observation was applied. Through it, the subjects of research showed weaknesses when pronouncing the lθl in words like thanks, thin other difficult consonant sounds, like lθl, /z/, /v/, /r/. It also showed that the students' motivation sometimes was weak, mainly when lesson were in the

last period of the morning and the students were eager to get to their houses and they felt anxious. Nevertheless, they answered some exercises spontaneously.

Pedagogical test

The results of the initial diagnosis showed that the majority of the students have problems when pronouncing the sound /θ/ in words like thanks, thin, the /v/ in the after greetings when they express they feel like very…, /z/ when they pronounce the days of the week. It was also confirmed that the sound /ʒ/ in words like television was the most difficult to pronounce. (See Annex 6)

2.3.4 Reflections and regularities of the needs assessment

Triangulation was used in order to identify regularities about the studied problem taking as point of departure the data obtained through the administration of different instruments.

Regularities:
Strengths

- The syllabus for 6th grade provides guidelines for the teacher
- The majority of the students like English
- There are good interpersonal relations among the students in the classroom
- Students enjoy pair and group work activities
- The age of the students encourage the learning of a foreign language

Weaknesses:

- Most of the exercises are designed for developing grammar and writing
- The exercises on pronunciation that appear in their workbook are not enough
- The students make pronunciation mistakes mainly in those sounds that do not exist in Spanish
- The students show difficulties when pronouncing troublesome English consonant sounds like /dʒ/, /v/, /θ/, and /z/.
- The students tend to pronounce the words as they write them

The regularities previously stated confirmed the problematic situation described in the introduction of this paper. This led the author to build up exercises to enhance students' pronunciation of troublesome consonants.

2.4 The fifth step: Developing, implementing and monitoring the action plan

The fifth step entailed developing, implementing and monitoring the action plan. The action plan consisted designing exercises, in which the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sound is given special attention. These exercises were designed, implemented, and monitored during the academic year.

Reflections on the process of implementation of the exercises

At the beginning of the school year 2018-2019, it was detected that students from 6th grade at "Benito Juarez" Elementary School had some problems in the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds.

Consequently, it was designed an initial proposal of seven exercises that were intended to have them overcome difficulties in each of the seven English new consonants. The exercises were mainly reading out load activities, information gap activities and games. Some of them went well mainly the most motivating ones like games and chain stories, but others did not go so well because they were less motivating according to the student's age.

The discussion group analyzed the initial proposal of exercises and recommended that exercises should be flexible and should be adapted to the student's age. They also pointed out the need of designing exercises for the seven troublesome English consonant sounds according to communicative function of all the units. Thus, the group recommended that the exercises had a uniform structure.

The author followed most of the suggestions for bettering the proposal.

2.5 Proposal of the exercises to improve pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds

Once the exercises were implemented, the author reflected on their own practice and after some discussion in the group an improved version of twelve exercises emerged from the action research process.

2.5.1 Rationale of the proposal

Philosophical foundations

The current research is based on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy. This philosophy considers language as a social phenomenon used by men for communication in the course of labor. Therefore, the main objective of language is communication. The relationship between practice, theory and improved practice is appreciated and manifested by the scientific methods used in this research. The proposal is aimed at the development of students' pronunciation as the bases for further communication for the creation of and a positive learning environment that will help sixth grade students improve their accuracy in English pronunciation.

Psychological foundations

The psychological precepts are based on the work of L.S. Vygotsky who points out that the school plays an important role, as a socializing institution, in the transmission of the relevant products of culture. According to his point of view, there is no learning without a certain level of previous development and there is no development without learning. That is why a proposal of exercises was implemented in order to develop of students' pronunciation as the bases for further communication in English language.

Methodological foundations

The proposal is based on the use of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and principles. Language is taught to develop students' abilities in the use of the oral language at an elementary level. In order to attain this objective the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles should be followed. Different authors have defined the CLT principles. The author has followed the ones redefined by Alfredo Camacho as they were aimed at the teaching of a foreign language in elementary school. The elementary communicative competence of the teaching of English is the main objective to be attained in students from such level.

2.5.2 Objective and characteristics of the exercises to improve pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds

General Objective

The objective of this proposal is to have 6th grade students from Benito's Juarez elementary school improve the pronunciation of troublesome English consonants.

Characteristics of the proposal

The proposal consist of 12 exercises about some communicative functions in different units and lessons that have been designed mainly for controlled practice activities. These activities are aimed to reinforce students' ability to produce troublesome English consonant sounds, as well as to create a need for students to concentrate and think about improving their pronunciation as a way to improve their overall performance in the English language.

Some of the exercises to practice were taken from original sources because they fit with the content to be taught, and the students' characteristics and needs. Nevertheless, most of them were adapted to the students' level in which the teacher took into account age, interest and background knowledge. Furthermore, the exercises move to easy to complex activities and they all respond to the aim that is previously specified.

The structure of the exercises comprises the type of the activity taking into account the technique , the unit it can be used , the objective taking into account the sound students are going to practice, the stage in which it is going to be taught, the classroom organization , the time allotted, the procedure and the instructions to be follow. Most of the exercises are to be used in the controlled practice stage.

The entire proposal is in a booklet, which appears in Annex 7

Next, an example of an exercise is provided.

Activity # 4: Tongue Twister (Taken from http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm)

Unit 2: Going to school

Objective: To practice the pronunciation of sound /ʃ/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the students the tongue twister first slowly, then faster and faster in order to the students get familiar with the pronunciation of the whole tongue twister.

The teacher will make the students repeat the tongue twister in order to make them practice the sound /ʃ/.

The teacher will repeat the tongue twister as many times as possible.

Instructions:

Listen carefully and repeat after the teacher:

``*The Fisherman*´´

There was a fisherman named Fisher

who fished for some fish in a fissure.

Till a fish with a grin,

pulled the fisherman in.

Now they are fishing in the fissure for Fisher.

Main transformations in the teaching learning process of pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds after implementing the changes

During the implementation of the proposal, the result was good as a whole, because both, students´ motivation toward the subject and their pronunciation improved. The students showed themselves more excited as the exercises were implemented. It was not necessary to force them to participate or to talk. In addition, they were looking forward to participate in the development of the exercises, even though; they wanted more exercises of that kind. However, the author found some difficulties. Not all exercises fulfilled the students' needs as the author originally thought. Some passive exercises as filling the gaps activities did not motivate the students; on the contrary, they felt distracted and did not concentrate.

At the end of this step, the author decided to support his reflections by the informal group of discussion as it has been happening during the process. The group considered that the proposal is useful and contribute to the improvement of young learners pronunciation of troublesome English consonants. They also said that it was a good idea to include the exercises in a booklet as a complementary material for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

- The theoretical and methodological judgments that support the enhancement of pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds within the teaching learning process of English speaking ability were based on the theory regarding the teaching learning process of pronunciation of English from a communicative perspective and on the comparison between English and Spanish.

- The assessment of the current situation regarding the pronunciation of troublesome consonant sounds by the students from 6th grade students at "Benito Juarez" elementary school revealed that the main difficulties are related to the pronunciation of seven new consonant sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue.

- The changes introduced in the teaching learning process were exercises that contributed to the improvement of the pronunciation of troublesome English consonants by 6th graders. The exercises were related to the practice of troublesome consonant sounds through different communicative functions by means of individual and pair work.

- While implementing the changes in the teaching learning process of the English, some things went well and others did not go so well. On one hand, the practice of pronunciation of the troublesome consonant sounds was in some way successfully accomplished, because the subjects of research improved speaking ability in a perceptible way. On the other hand, some activities were found a little bit troublesome because students needed more time in order to complete them and sometimes they did not have an spontaneous participation to do oral activities because they did not know how to pronounce some words.

- A booklet of exercises emerged from the action research process and proved to be useful and motivating for the improvement of students' pronunciation regarding the of troublesome consonant sounds in the teaching learning process of English in 6th grade in elementary school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After the implementation of the proposal of exercises in 6thgrade at "Benito Juarez" elementary school, it is the intention of the author to do the following recommendations in order to improve its quality:

- To evaluate the exercises in another school or in further 6th grade classes at "Benito Juarez" elementary school
- To present the results in scientific events in order to provide a useful material for teachers who need to find activities to work with pronunciation
- To present the proposal to the specialists who are designing changes in the English teaching learning process as part of the process of improvement of the education system.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Aguila Ruiz, D. (2015-2016). A proposal of exercises to improve students´ pronunciation in ninth graders from José Martí Secondary School in Sagua La Grande (Mayor Paper). Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas, Santa Clara.

2. Betancourt Ordetx, B. M. (2015-2016). The development of the spelling skill in English in Class 6thA from José Antonio Echeverría Elementary School (Major Paper). Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas, Santa Clara.

3. Ynfiesta González, O. (2015-1016). *The expansion of vocabulary in English Language in 9TH grade students from "Antonio Guiteras Holmes" Secondary School (Mayor Paper).* Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas, Santa Clara.

4. Alice C. O`Maggio, Heinle and Heinle Publishers, Boston, 1986, pp. 7-8; referring to Canale and Swain, 1980 and Canale, 1983.) Compilation of materials for didactics for foreign language. (2016).

5. Hughes. H (2017) *Techniques in Teaching Pronunciation of the English Language.*

6. Bailey, K. M. (s.f.). *Second Language Acquisition Studies.*California: TESOL.

7. Camacho Delgado, A. D. (2017). Compilation of materials for Didactics of Foreign Languages. Santa Clara.

8. Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners.* Cambridge University pres.

9. European Commission . (2011). European strategic framework for education and training (ET 2020). Language learning at pre-primary school level:Making it efficient and sustainable. *Commission Staff for Working Paper.* Brussels: European Commision.

10. Ferrance, E. (2000). *Themes in Education: Action Research.* Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory At Brown University: Brown University.

11. Finocchiario, M. a. (1983). *The Functional-Notional Approach: From Theory to Practice.* New York: Oxford University Press.

12. Harmer, J. (2012). *Essential Teacher Knowledge. Core Concepts in English Language Teaching.* Edingburg: Pearson Education Limited.

13. Naiman, N. (1989). Teaching Pronunciation Communicatively. *Communication Journal, INTUR, .*

14. Richards, J. C. (1999). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. A description and analysis.* United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

15. Tench, P. (1990). Pronunciation Skills. Edición Revolucionaria.

16. Thomas S. C., F. (2007). *"Action Research" in Reflective Language Teaching: From Research to Practice.* Continuum.

17. Salvador, B. (2006) *A Training Course for Developing Academic Linguistic Competence in Foreign Language Teacher Education*. Digital version.

18. *Suárez y Martin (2005).Communicative tasks to contribute to the development of speaking skills in the training of bachelors in English Language with a major in French* (Major Paper)

19. http://www.learninglifetoff.com, 17/2/2015,

20. http://www.education.com,2010,

21. http://learninglifeoff.com, Sandra Zimmer.

22. https://www.fluentu.com/blog/english/tongue-twisters-in-english/

23. http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm

24. *https://archiv.elearning.fpf.slu.cz. Testing pronunciation.*

25. *Villate & Rodriguez (1987). Lectures on Comparative Typology of English and Spanish. La Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación.*

26. Pennington, M. C. (1996). *Phonology in English language teaching: An international approach*. London, UK: Longman

Annexes

Annex # 1

Guide for the analysis of documents

Objective: to determine the treatment of pronunciation as presented in the official documents.

Documents:

1- 6th grade English syllabus

2- Student workbook

Indicators:

- Objectives and contents to be achieved, according to the syllabus.
- Exercises dealing with consonants.
- Number of exercises dealing with consonants
- Quality of the exercises.
- Guidelines to teach English consonants in Elementary S**chool**

Annex # 2

Participant observation (during the building up process of the proposal)

Objective: To corroborate the problem detected in the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds by 6th graders at "Benito Juarez" Elementary School.

School: Benito Juarez   _Time:_ 45min   _subject: English_

Teacher: @   _type of lessons_: Presentation

Class grade: 6th

Categories

1. Pronunciation of troublesome consonants.
2. What are the students´ common mistakes?
3. How is the students´ motivation during the English language lessons?
4. How do the students like to work? In pairs, in groups or individually?
5. How is the students´ involvement seen during the lessons?
6. What is the quality of students´ answers?

Annex # 3

Interview to students

<u>**Objective:**</u> To get information about students' motivation, most common mistakes in pronunciation and changes in the methodology suggested by the students.

Indicators:

- Student's motivation towards the subject.
- Student's opinion about the type of activities they like the most.
- Pronunciation of English difficult consonant sounds
- Changes in the methodology suggested by the students

Questions:

¿Crees que la asignatura de inglés es importante para ti? ¿Por qué?

¿Qué tipos de actividades te gustan realizar durante las clases de inglés?

¿Qué sonidos del inglés te son más difíciles de pronunciar?

¿Crees que deberían practicar más los contenidos aprendidos en cada clase?

ANNEX # 4

Learning research journal

Objective: to reflect on the difficulties that the students have in each activity and think about the changes that should be introduced to improve the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds.

Structure of the learning research journal

1. Number and unit of each lesson

2. Objective the lesson

3. Topic

4. Answer to:

 a) What went well?

 b) What went wrong?

5. Reflections with the purpose of avoiding the same mistakes in other lessons.

Example of the journal.

Unit 1: Review
Lesson 7
Time 45 min
Aim: The students should be able to:
To reproduce the ways used in English to describe family members traits in English by means of oral activities that contribute to improve the pronunciation of troublesome English consonant sounds as well as to develop communicative competence.

Topic: Family members

What went well?

In this lesson the objective was in some way successfully accomplished to practice the dificult consonant sound /θ/ in family members. The students´ motivation was

excellent because they love to practice the contents using pair work, listen activities and role play.

What went wrong?

The main problem in this lesson was that the students had to listent to a dialog but it was dificult due to some noise pollution.

Some activities were a little bit difficult because they needed more time in order to complete them and they did not have an spontaneous participation to do the role play because they didn't know how to pronounce some words.

Reflections

I think that the exercises may be changed in order to make them easier for the students to understand them. I would change the way I organized the pair work. I would also plan the lesson more carefully in order to give the students more time to do the exercise or some help.

These activities were a little more difficult but in general students practiced the content and in some way they achieved the general goal that was to practice the dificult consonant sound /θ/ and learn about family members.

Pedagogical test

Objective: To assess students' level of pronunciation.

Aspects to evaluate:

- Pronunciation of sounds that do not exist in Spanish
- Pronunciation of English difficult consonant sounds

Chain Game (Chinese whispers)

Unit 3 : Home Sweet Home

Aim: to check the pronunciation of the most troublesome consonant sounds in English

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: group work

Time: 15-20 min

Procedures:

- The teacher will sit the learners in a circle or will put them on a line.
- The teacher will whisper a word in the ear of the first student and the word will be passed around the class until the last student. If the same word with the same sounds gets to the end, the students get a point, if not the teacher gets a point.
- Students are asked to brainstorm words with the sound that was passed around.

Instructions:

Listen carefully to these words. Repeat the word you eared to your partner.

Word list:

Bookshelf	shower	pressure
Dishes	furniture	picture
Thirteen	three	very
Vision	eleven	evening

Annex # 6

Evaluation of troublesome English consonant sounds (Initial diagnosis)

Evaluation of troublesome English consonant sounds
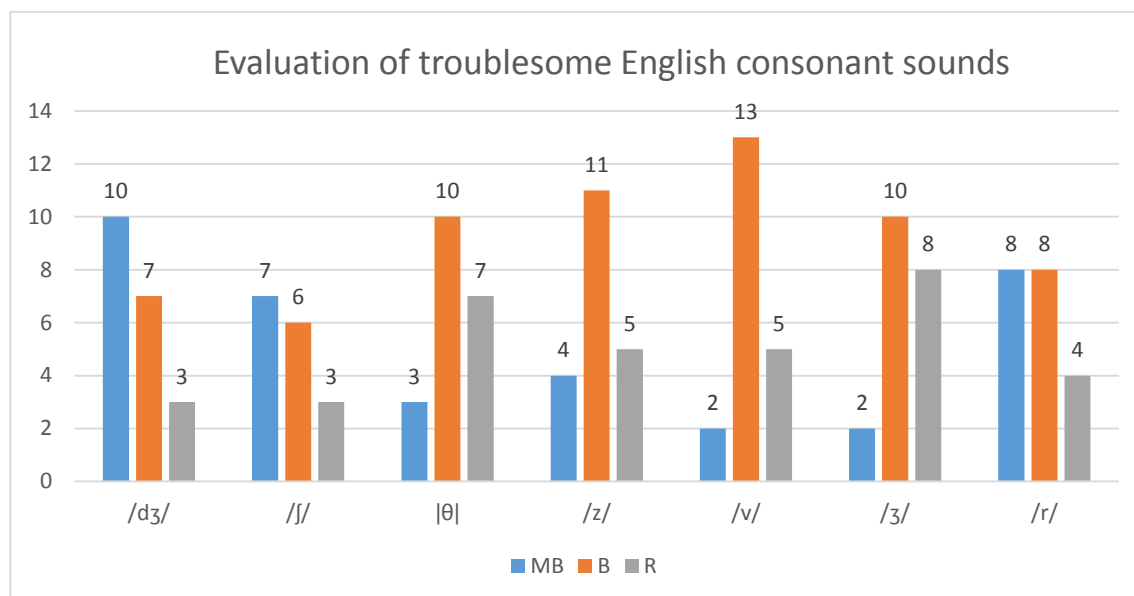
ANNEX # 7

Elementary Education

Booklet

of Activities for

6th graders

Author: Vladimir Espinoza Delgado

School Year: 2018-2019

School: Benito Juarez

Activity # 1: Tongue Twister **(Taken from** http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm **)**

Unit 1 :Review

Objective: To practice the pronunciation of sound /ʒ/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the students the tongue twister first slowly and then faster and faster in order to the students get familiar with the pronunciation of the whole tongue twister.

The teacher will make the students to repeat the tongue twister in order to make them practice the sound /ʒ/.

The teacher will repeat the tongue twister as many time as possible.

Instructions:

Listen carefully and repeat after the teacher:

Dr. Johnson and Mr. Johnson, after great consideration, came to the conclusion that the Indian nation beyond the Indian Ocean is back in education because the chief occupation is cultivation

Activity # 2: Tongue Twister **(Taken from** http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm **)**

Unit 1: Review

Objective: To practice the pronunciation of sound /z/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the students the tongue twister first slowly and then faster and faster in order to the students get familiar with the pronunciation of the whole tongue twister.

The teacher will make the students to repeat the tongue twister in order to make them practice the sound /z/.

The teacher will repeat the tongue twister as many time as possible.

Instructions:

Listen carefully and repeat after the teacher:

``The Fuzzy Wuzzy bear´´

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear,

Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair,

Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy,

Was he?

Activity # 3: Filling the gaps activity (**Adapted from English Pronunciation in Use Elementary**)

Unit 1: Review

Objective: to practice the pronunciation of sound lθl

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will write several sentences in the black board with blank spaces

The teacher will ask the students to fill the gaps of the sentences with a lists of words shown belong the sentences

The teacher will demand the students to exchange the notebook with their partners in order to correct them answers.

The teacher will ask the students to read the sentences after they fill the gaps to check the pronunciation of words with sound lθl

Instructions:

Fill the gaps with the word that appear in the list

1. I <u>think</u> that's your mother
2. Are those your <u>things</u>?
3. It is your brother <u>birthday</u> on <u>Thursday</u>?
4. Your grandma <u>thinks</u> she is <u>thirty-three</u>
5. <u>Thanks</u> for those <u>thirty</u> e-mails
6. Today is the <u>third</u> <u>Thursday</u> of the <u>month</u>.

<u>Word list</u>

Think	Thursday x 2	thirty-three	
Things	birthday	Thanks	
Thinks	thirty	month	Third

Activity # 4: Tongue Twister **(Taken from** http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm **)**

Unit 2: Going to school

Objective: To practice the pronunciation of sound /ʃ/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the students the tongue twister first slowly and then faster and faster in order to the students get familiar with the pronunciation of the whole tongue twister.

The teacher will make the students to repeat the tongue twister in order to make them practice the sound /ʃ/.

The teacher will repeat the tongue twister as many time as possible.

Instructions:

Listen carefully and repeat after the teacher:

<u>``The Fisherman´´</u>

There was a fisherman named Fisher
who fished for some fish in a fissure.
Till a fish with a grin,
pulled the fisherman in.
Now they're fishing in the fissure for Fisher.

Activity # 5: Reading aloud (Taken from Face to Face Starter)

Unit 3: This is my family

Objective: to practice the English sound /ʃ/ through the reading of the poem `` Sharon has a small shop´´.

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 10-12 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the poem first in order to the students get familiar with the whole text

The teacher will emphasize in the pronunciation of sound /ʃ/

The teacher ask the students to read the poem in pairs.

Instructions:

A) Listen to this poem. Listen again and practice with your partner.

`` Sharon has a small shop´´

Sharon smith has a small shop

In Shanghai city center

She sell Spanish skirts

And Turkish shirts

And expensive British suits.

She sell Egyptian boots

And Russian coats

What can she sell you?

B) Work in pair. Take turns to say the lines of the poem.

Activity # 6: Filling the Gaps (Taken from English Pronunciation in Use Elementary)

Unit 3: Home Sweet Home

Objective: to practice the English sound /ʃ/ through a small dialogue activity.

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 10-12 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the dialogue aloud in order to make the students know the pronunciation of the words

The teacher will check the answers orally in order to know students mistakes in their pronunciation

The teacher will make emphasis in the pronunciation of sound /ʃ/

Instructions:

Complete this conversation using words from the word list. Then listen to your teacher and check your answer. Be ready to act it out.

Word List

Ships   jeep   chips   cheaps

Sid: Its fish and _____ for lunch, Joe!

Joe: _____!? I can't eat _____; they`re too big!

Sid: I said _____, you know, fried potatoes!

Joe: Oh, I see _____ with Ch. Not _____with an SH.

Sid: that's right. You are a genius, Joe!

Joe: Was the fish expensive, Sid!

Sid: No it was _____

Joe: _____!? You bought a _____?

Sid: No, _____, the opposite of expensive

Joe: Oh, I see _____ with CH, not _____ with J. Hoops!!

Activity # 7: Filling the Gaps (Taken from English Pronunciation in Use Elementary)

Unit 3: Home sweet Home

Objective: to practice the English sound /z/ through a small dialogue activity.

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 10-12 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the dialogue aloud in order to make the students know the pronunciation of the words

The teacher will check the answers orally in order to know students mistakes in their pronunciation

The teacher will make emphasis in the pronunciation of sound /z/

Instructions:

Complete this conversation using words from the word list. Then listen to your teacher and check your answer. Be ready to act it out.

Word List:

Eyes   ice   niece   knees

Sid: Alice's ____nice____ is nice.

Joe: Are nice, Sid. Plural. Her _____ are nice.

Sid: I'm not talking about her _____, I'm talking about her _____!

Joe: Oh, I see, _____ with a C.

Sid: That's right. She has a nice _____.

Joe: How can _____ be nice? It's too cold.

Sid: Not _____, you fool! _____, E-Y-E-S!

Activity # 8: Dialogue and role-play (Adapted from Face to Face Starter)

Unit 3: Home sweet Home

Objective: to practice the pronunciation of sound /θ/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-10 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the whole dialogue in order to make the students ear how to pronounce the words correctly (the teacher will make enfaces in the pronunciation of /θ/ sound)

The teacher will select one of the students (mainly one of the advanced ones) to practice the dialogue first.

The teacher will make the students to read the dialogue for them self and with their partner, then, the students will to act it out in from of the classroom.

Instructions:

Listen to the conversation. Then listen again and repeat with your partner.

A: hi mom! I'm at home

B: hi sweets!

A: where is grandpa?

B: he is in the bathroom installing the new bathtub.

A: a bathtub? Great! Finally I will take the bath that I like

B: please remember to save the water.

A: ok mom, I'm heading to help grandpa with the bathtub

B: ok see you

Activity #9: (Adapted from English Pronunciation in Use Elementary)

Unit 5 : Review

Objective: to produce the sound /Ɵ/ in initial and final position

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: group work

Time: 10 min

Procedures:

- The teacher reads the words for the students to repeat aloud. The Teacher uses different grouping for the repetition practice.
- The Students will work in pairs in order to increase the list with more words with the same sound. Then, they will read aloud all the words

Instructions:

Listen to the following words and repeat:

Thursday	Birth	Bath	Teeth	Warmth
Booth	Thirsty	Math	Thunder	Think
Thorn	Without			

Activity #10: Tongue twister **(Taken from** http://www.tongue-twister.net/en.htm **)**

Unit 6: That's the Way I like it

Objective: to practice the English consonant sound /dʒ/ trough a tongue twister activity

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 8-12 min

Procedure:

The teacher will read the students the tongue twister first slowly and then faster and faster in order to the students get familiar with the pronunciation of the whole tongue twister.

The teacher will make the students to repeat the tongue twister in order to make them practice the sound /dʒ/.

The teacher will repeat the tongue twister as many time as possible.

Instructions:

Listen carefully and repeat after the teacher:

Jean Claude Jaquettie, with his jacket on.
Jean Claude Jaquettie, with his jacket off.
Jean Claude Jaquettie, with his jacket on.
Jean Claude Jaquettie, with his jacket off.
Jacket on,
Jacket off,
Jacket on,
Jacket off.

Activity #11: Dialogue and role play (Adapted from Face to Face Starter)

Unit 7: That's the way I like it

Objective: to practice the pronunciation of sound /v/ through a role play activity.

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: pair work

Time: 10-15 min

Procedures:

The teacher will read the whole dialogue in order to make the students ear how to pronounce the words correctly (the teacher will make enfaces in the pronunciation of /v/ sound)

The teacher will select one of the students (mainly one of the advanced ones) to practice the dialogue first.

The teacher will make the students to read the dialogue for them self and with their partner, then, the students will to act it out in from of the classroom.

Instructions:

Listen to the conversation. Then listen again and repeat with your partner.

A: Where do you work?

B: I am a waiter and I work in a very nice café in Vienna

A: when do you work?

B: I work every evening from five to eleven in a week

A: do you work in the weekend in the evening to?

B: no I don't in work in the weekend only in the morning?

Activity # 12: Filling the gaps

(Adapted from English Pronunciation in Use Elementary)

Unit 7: That's the way I like it

Objective: to practice the pronunciation of sound /v/

Stage: controlled practice

Organization: individual and pair work

Time: 10-15 min

Procedures:

The teacher will demand to the students to complete the blank spaces using the words that appear in the list according what is shown in the pictures

The teacher will check the answers orally in order to check the students' pronunciation making emphasis in the pronunciation of sound /v/

Instructions:

Complete the blank spaces taking into account the pictures that are shown

Word list

Few	voices	seventh	~~fine~~	forks
Vegetables	lift	five	floor	view
Driving	knifes			

I – A <u>fine</u> _____   II - _____ _____

III – _____ too _____   IV – A _____ _____
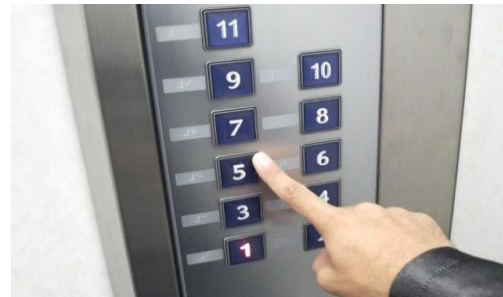

V - _____ and _____   VI - The _____ to the _____