

# A CRITICAL REFLECTION ABOUT THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS AND PRACTICE

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# **FINAL MASTER ESSAY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are several reasons why I am doing the Master in Education. First of all, I consider education as one of the most important foundations for the formation of a proper society. Thus, I consider the role of teaching as a way of helping society and the individuals that live in it. Moreover, I have liked teaching since I was a child and especially teaching English because I consider myself to be a communicative, active, receptive, flexible and empathetic person and, from my point of view, those are the main qualities that a teacher should have. However, in my case, I do not only like teaching but I like education in general. In my opinion, a teacher should not only be good at transmitting the contents of his/her subject but also he/she should be able to have conversations with the students and parents, to understand and help them. The problem is how to link both, the passion for teaching and the difficulty of understanding and helping parents and students in many occasions.

In order to refer to the duration of the master, I would like to mention that it ranges between 60 and 120 credits structured into two phases which are organised into several modules and into three practicum periods.

Furthermore, the main subjects that compose the master are divided into two phases called semesters. During the first semester the subjects are taught in Spanish and there are several optional subjects while during the second semester the subjects are divided depending on the specialty and, in my case, they are taught in English and there are also several optional subjects.

In the final master essay my main aim is to critically reflect about the existing relationships between two chosen projects that are, in my case, the learning unit and the research report. Similarly, in order to demonstrate my learning in terms of education after the master and to propose innovative ideas to be applied, the conclusions and the future proposal reflecting our knowledge will be included.

The essay has been divided following the guidelines provided by The University of Zaragoza in which it was stipulated that, first, an introduction to the essay should be given in order to situate the reader. This introduction explains the type of teacher I want to be and how the theoretical explanations during my master and the school placement have contributed to my teacher training. Second, in the justification, I have made reference to the way in which the projects chosen for the analysis have helped me to become the type of teacher I want to be. Third, I have included a section in which to critically reflect upon the development of my competences for the teaching profession and relate the two chosen projects to this development. As a fourth section, I have reflected about my school placement, my master sessions and also about how my learning unit and my research report have helped me to become the English teacher I want to be apart from stating a series of future proposals concerning both projects. Finally, the references and bibliography used to create my final master essay have been added.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

There are several important and motivating reasons that lead me to focus my final master essay on two projects that are the learning unit and the research report.

First of all, both are interesting and useful because they do not only contribute to improving my teaching-learning practice in the present times but also in the future. In the case of the learning unit, it is a basic device for me to transmit the contents to the students properly and according to a previously stated plan. Additionally, it is a way of justifying my teaching practice reflecting, not only the sort of teacher I am but also the current methodological techniques which are employed, such as task-based language teaching, the communicative approach and cooperative learning. Consequently, it seems to me after my school placement that if I had enough time, it would be interesting not only to analyze several learning units from different teachers but also to check if they are put into practice during the lessons. Likewise, if I refer to the research report, the contributions to education are innumerable since this project is based on research carried out during my school placement in the public secondary school *IES Pilar Lorengar* which has been compared to the research done in two other schools. What is more, the project includes real data collected such as the questionnaires completed by both teachers and students to evaluate the pronunciation lessons. Thus, thanks to this research, secondary school teachers, researchers and students that want to become future teachers will be able to acquire a real perspective of the classroom's atmosphere, the students in it and the role of teachers in education nowadays concerning a concrete topic like pronunciation in our specific context so as to introduce the necessary improvements.

Concerning the practical implications of the learning unit, I can state that it can be a tool of reference for both new teachers and those that substitute providing them with the necessary information about the group and the methodology or the type of activities done while the research project includes the opinions of both teachers and students concerning foreign language teaching. What is more, it would be methodologically useful to carry out general research using all the research projects done so as to make them available to all secondary school teachers to improve their teaching practice.

On the whole, both the learning unit and the research report are useful materials in education and, consequently, are socially relevant. If I refer to the learning unit, it is a basic tool to teach entailing, at the same time, the description of the type of teacher I am. If we look backwards at the different language teaching methods that exist and that have been carried out when teaching English, the communicative approach which emerged in 1980 stands out as the predominant one nowadays to teach English as a foreign language. Thus, my learning unit focuses on the communicative approach and cooperative learning because I consider that these approaches implicitly tackle the improvement of oral skills and pronunciation but also the creation of a class spirit placing learners at the centre of the learning process and providing them with communicative situations. These will help to make them realize the utility of the English language, at the same time, motivating and transmitting to them a passion for the

language. The lesson plans are intended to guide me in my everyday teaching practice. Moreover, it facilitates the integration of objectives, contents, methodology and evaluation and by means of the self-assessment it helps me to check the suitability of the activities to the objectives, the relevance of the final task as regards learning objectives, the students' motivation towards the final task, the timing, the amount of interaction in the classroom and the suitability of the students distribution letting me, as a teacher, verify the adaptation of the learning process to the characteristics and necessities of the students to carry out the necessary changes. In the case of the research project, an analysis of one of the components of English as an L2 is proposed providing necessary ideas for educational researchers which are frequently difficult to obtain. This occurs mainly because of the lack of time but also because of the privacy of a few secondary school teachers that sometimes do not permit researchers to access and observe their lessons. Overall, I can say that the research project can somehow contribute to improvements in the educational system in general and of the teachers and their methodology in a concrete way fostering motivation in the students.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Society in general holds the belief that teaching is a simple matter of positioning yourself in front of a class and transmitting a series of facts and information to your students following contents officially marked by authorities. However, as we have seen in this Master's programme, the teaching task is far more complicated since it is not only a matter of transmission of information but also of guidance towards the development of a series of skills and competences. Additionally, I consider the necessity of a previous and subsequent analysis of the class in terms of their learning and the best way to aid in their development of skills and competences. I have come to the conclusion that all of this is essential in order to become the teacher that I really want to be, that is to say, a guide for my students that will help them to achieve effective learning by means of communication, cooperative work, management, flexibility and comprehension.

There are two documents written for this Master's degree which have helped me to aim towards effective learning and these are the Learning Unit and the Research Report. On the one hand, the Learning Unit has guided me in the transmission of contents, skills and competences during my school placement. Moreover, it has facilitated the self-assessment of my contribution as a teacher and has helped to define myself as the teacher I want to be. On the contrary, the Research Report has made me realize the relevance of doing constant research in order to obtain an effective and complete learning in my students. These are the main reasons why I have decided to relate both projects in the final master essay. Accordingly, this point will deal with a description of the learning unit and the research report leading into the existing relationship between both projects.

<sup>1</sup>On the one hand, the learning unit that has been selected for the reflection focuses on the topic of Information and Communications Technology (ICTs), concretely, on mobile phones that are so present in our everyday society and that have facilitated the integration, study and improved pronunciation of spoken utterances in English. The learning unit presents this topic by means of using new methodology and innovative techniques in the teaching of English as a foreign language such as cooperative learning and the communicative approach. It is made up of several sections such as the introduction that includes the justification, the contextualization and the organization of the learning unit. Moreover, the contribution to the key competences, the objectives, the contents, the methodology and the evaluation criteria are included as are other points such as detailed lesson plans, the conclusions, the references and the appendixes.

First, concerning the introduction of the learning unit, I consider it absolutely necessary to describe it here in detail because it is in this point where you explain why you have chosen this topic and how you, as a teacher, are going to help the students to achieve their main aim in this unit of work, briefly quoting the materials and the devices used. Due to this, my unit is intended to motivate the students to get them to participate in spontaneous communicative situations in the classroom approximating our students to the use of new technologies. It

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<sup>1</sup> The Learning Unit can be found in Appendix 1.

starts with the simpler input that gets more complex as the lesson goes on. This allows the teacher to go from the old to the new, making sure that all students get involved in the activities and feel at ease. The materials chosen include oral and visual messages, which will help the students to follow the teacher by establishing connections between the foreign language and the images. Motivation is also enhanced in the final task. As the students will have to explore, express and exchange their work with the rest of the class they will be encouraged to do their best. Finally, the use of the ICT such as the blog will help them become autonomous and life-long learners. Furthermore, the contextualization and the organization of the learning unit are relevant points since the objectives and contents must be intimately related to the course and to the group apart from indicating the sessions in which the unit has been divided and the timing for every session. Accordingly, it is not the same to teach a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year CSE students than to teach a 1<sup>st</sup> year CSE students although also variations are also present in groups of the same year. On the one hand, my unit of work has been addressed to an ordinary group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year CSE students. At this age, they should therefore have acquired basic oral and written skills to develop communicative situations. Likewise, they already know basic vocabulary for descriptions and can use different present, past and future forms that will help them complete the final task. The book they are using is *English World 3* Burlington Books. However, it has been divided into six appendixes in order to work with every skill that composes the English language such as Language in Use, Listening, Listening Review, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Moreover, every session has been designed to be covered in 5-60 minute periods.

As regards the learning unit of work, the students' learning process is mainly focused on the contents and general objectives that are based upon the Real Decreto 1631/2006 (29<sup>th</sup> December 2006) whereby the minimum requirements of compulsory education are established as well as the contribution to the key competences included within the framework of the proposal submitted by the European Union. Consequently, it is absolutely relevant that objectives, contents and competencies must be intimately connected in order to obtain a coherent didactic unit. Thus, my learning unit is divided into six sessions (Use of English, Listening, Listening Review, Reading, Speaking and Writing) in which a series of activities to develop the basic competences are worked upon. First, the students will develop communicative competence talking about their mobile phones, producing a piece of descriptive writing about them and understanding listening texts with conversations about short messages. Second, the students will acquire basic technological skills in information and communication technologies and concretely in the world of mobile phones with the aim of using these in the learning process. An example of this is that students will write about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones on a web forum that is the final task. Third, the students will recognize the need for mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity with others and develop the habit of constructive discussion in order to promote the common values in a democratic society by means of activities that define what kind of mobile phone users they are or expressing their own opinions about the difficulties of living without a mobile phone. Fourth, the students will learn about different cultures and societies, concretely the British culture, using the world of mobile phones, with the aim of

valuing them critically and, at the same time, showing respect not only towards one's own culture but also others'. Fifth, the students will use various sources of information so as to acquire new knowledge with a critical eye. Thus, as a final task, they will write about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones on a web forum, developing and consolidating, at the same time, the right attitude towards study and discipline as the necessary condition to properly perform the learning tasks and as a means of personal development. Sixth, throughout each of the activities included in this learning unit based on cooperative work, the entrepreneurial spirit is reinforced, developing self-confidence, a critical attitude, personal initiative and the ability to plan, make decisions and assume responsibilities when talking about their mobile phones and producing descriptive pieces of writing about them and the kind of mobile phone users students are. Moreover, students will work on the final task in groups writing a web forum post and, consequently, reinforcing the concept of team-work and learning to value others' points of view, experiences and ways of thinking.

In terms of methodology, and following the concepts described by Kumaradivelu (2006:61,70), tracks have changed and several challenging trends have been included. Accordingly, during the 1980s the communicative language approach became the dominant force for teaching English as a foreign language and during the 1990s language learning and teaching went further, it was not only about communication but also about creating the cultural forms and pertinent knowledge that give meaning to the life experiences of teachers and learners. Thus, when creating my learning unit and when putting it into practice, the communicative language approach will be my main basis since I support the ideas of American (Savignon, 1983), British (Breen and Candlin, 1980) and Canadian (Canale and Swain, 1980) experts who support the idea that language learning is a process of negotiation, interpretation and expression (Kumaradivelu 2006: 61). Likewise, in my unit, the learning tasks and activities will be designed for students to learn the language (English) in authentic and meaningful contexts of use. The learners will be the centre of the teaching-learning process. Additionally, teaching will be modified according to the student's necessities, abilities or interests. The teacher will provide the students with a rich environment for communication fostering listening and speaking skills and encouraging participation in the learner boosting the confidence in the use of language. Moreover, the areas of language learning will be taught in an integrated way to provide multiple perspectives and meaningful connections since the development of language skills and knowledge about the language requires the teacher's guidance to put together their final spoken, written and multimodal products. Furthermore, when planning and developing my lessons, as a teacher, I will employ the following teaching processes to motivate learning and help students make connections with what they already know, to revise and reinforce what has been known, to diagnose pupil's needs, abilities or interests. Moreover, my goals as a teacher will include the following: to identify learning gaps, monitor their learning and provide timely and useful feedback for improving learning and self-assessment, to teach language in real contexts of use and invite pupils to learn cooperatively with the teacher and the rest of students, to facilitate discovery by prompting, posing questions and supporting the process by which pupils can learn about a skill, strategy, process or rule without



prior or explicit instruction and to explain and clarify a skill, a strategy or process also teaching it in contexts of meaningful use.

One of the key points in every teaching-learning process is the evaluation criteria or marking criteria which are intimately connected to the contents and objectives aimed for the group. Consequently, in this section I explain how the teaching-learning process is evaluated, that is, through direct observation and the final task although I did a breakdown of the evaluation percentages in order to make it clearer for the students. Apart from that, I also consider it necessary to self-assess my work as a teacher in order to make the necessary modifications according to the characteristics and necessities of the students so the assessment of my Learning Unit is done by checking the suitability of the activities to the objectives, the suitability and relevance of the final task as regards learning objectives, the students' motivation towards the final task, the timing, the amount of interaction in the classroom, the suitability of the students distribution and a one-minute paper. After having carefully analysed the data collected, the teacher will verify the adaptation of the learning process to the characteristics and necessities of the students to carry out the necessary changes.

Following C.J. Brumfit and K. Johnson (1981: 117) we see that English language teaching is a problem that has come into particular prominence over the past few years and needs to be solved. Accordingly, one of the solutions they propose is to use an approach that combines situational presentation with structural practice (The Communicative approach). Furthermore, a genius in the design of activities that is Spencer Kagan <http://www.kaganonline.com> also supports the use of cooperative learning during the lessons in order to create class spirit and motivate the students. According to Émile Chartier, a well known philosopher, journalist and teacher at diverse institutions, using at least a *pinch* of difficulty will make our students obtain new knowledge as they participate actively. Concretely, I would like to underline the four most important and necessary terms when designing a lesson, following Robert Marzano, 2007 in his article *The Art and Science of Teaching*, which are high but realistic expectations in teachers and awareness of the distractions which may be present in our classes such as the concept of mini-vacations. Moreover, it is fundamental to establish communicative learning goals, track students' progress and celebrate success. As teachers, we must devise tests or activities to keep our students informed of their learning process, fixing problems or celebrating success and providing them with positive feedback. Third, we as teachers, have to help the students to effectively interact with new knowledge using motivating activities, closer to their experiences but always bearing in mind the different levels within a class. According to Robert Marzano, the human brain assimilates information in chunks, thus I considered this a relevant concept when planning lessons during my school placement aiming to make the students reflect about the teaching-learning sessions. Finally, teachers should help the students practice new knowledge and deepen their understanding of it, monitoring them and making them *protagonists* of their own learning. Therefore, having taken into consideration all these authors, I have designed my

activities for the learning unit based on cooperative learning and a task-based approach. The lesson plans have been designed in order to show a breakdown of every session describing, at the same time, the teaching-learning process for each activity and clearly dividing them into pre- activities or warm-up, while-activities and post-activities regarding every skill of English language learning (Use of English, Listening, Listening Review, Reading, Speaking and Writing). I have borne in mind some of my main aims when teaching which are to facilitate the students' understanding of the information and the activities provided, to motivate the students making them protagonists of their learning process and to make communication possible and useful.

A few examples of the activities I have included in my learning unit which I would like to underline here are the ones used in session 1 (Use of English) because I had the opportunity to implement them in one of the sessions of my teaching placement in the public secondary school *Pilar Lorengar*. I introduced the session by writing two sentences for self assessment on the blackboard like *I have participated (1 2 3 4 5)* and *I have worked (1 2 3 4 5)* that the students should complete at the end of the session. I firmly believe in the use of this strategy because you make the students aware that the teacher will be monitoring and assessing them during the session so as to compare his/her own perception of the learning process with the student's. After that, a series of warm-up questions about mobile phones were asked in order to guide and facilitate the learning in the subsequent activities creating, at the same time, a pleasant atmosphere and getting the students involved in the topic. After that, the students brainstormed vocabulary about mobile phones as a whole-class activity and wrote it on the board. Later on, the students were given a copy including a brainstorming of their mobile phone parts with the functions that every part carries out. Once at home, as a homework activity, the students were asked to colour code every part and its function in order to distinguish them easily. During the second half of this session, the students were divided in groups of 4-5, in order to foster the communicative approach and cooperative learning. They were given a key word and asked to write correct sentences using them. After that, the teacher wrote a series of questions on the board including the contents for this session such as the verb *to have* and the verb *to be able to*; *Have you got a mobile phone?*, *What can you do with it?* Thus, in the same groups, the students were doing a survey with the other classmates ticking (✓) or crossing (✗) what they and their partners had or did not have in their mobile phones. As a homework activity, the students were asked to write about their mobile phones using previous knowledge, the verbs presented and the contents practiced during the lesson. At the end of the session, the students were provided with a one-minute paper in order to self-assess to verify the adaptation of the students to the learning process and carry out the necessary changes. The questions asked were *What was the activity you most liked?* and *What was the activity you liked least?*

There were also reinforcement activities for those students who had difficulties achieving the main objectives, in this class in particular there were two girls and a boy that presented a few difficulties while learning English. These activities have been included in my unit of work in case more relevant problems with the language learning were found in these or other students. Thus, as scaffolding for these students I would help them while working with the whole-class warm-up

activity by starting their possible answers with phrases like *once, twice... I've had it for/since...* after asking them. After that, in the brainstorming activity, these students would receive a differentiated worksheet with a description of every part of their mobile phones and its corresponding function already colour-coded so that they only needed to match them. Finally, when dividing the class into small groups or teams to do the survey, the heterogeneous teams would be made up of those students with a good level of English and those who had difficulties to reach the main objectives so that those with a good level would help the others.

Nonetheless, I would also like to highlight the activities included in appendix 6, session 6 in order to underline the importance of creativity and cooperative work in the English teaching-learning process. I would like to clarify that this session was not implemented during my school placement but I wanted to show it because I find it interesting to reflect the students' progress throughout the unit and into the final task included in this section. Accordingly, in the first half of the session, I introduced the connectors of cause and effect *because, so, since, therefore* and *because of*. After that, the class was divided into small groups or teams of students and they were given sentence extracts in order to match them using a connector of cause and effect. The second half of the session, would take place in the computer room so that the students could develop techniques of autonomous learning. After that, in pairs or groups of three, depending on the availability of computers, the students worked on a post about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones that they must upload to a web created by the English department. First, the students in small groups brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones and they write them in a chart. After that, the task is divided so that a member of the group writes a short paragraph about the advantages of mobile phones, another member writes about the disadvantages and the other writes at least two sentences about how to solve the problems with mobile phones.

As homework the students will check other groups' writings following a given checklist. The criteria to be assessed will be:

- ✓ Capital Letters and Punctuation
- ✓ Paragraph Structure
- ✓ Word Order
- ✓ Adjective Order
- ✓ Referencing
- ✓ Connectors of Cause and Effect

The teacher will monitor the students and will check that the corrections are made in the appropriate way. Finally, the most relevant posts written by the students will be read to the whole class.

Dealing with the conclusions of the learning unit, I have to say that they are, for me, one of the most relevant sections because, as a teacher, it is there where you show how the unit of work has worked and your own reflections as a teacher about your role and outcomes. From my point of view, this is a part that includes

the previous, the while and the subsequent reflections of a learning unit implementation. Concretely referring to my learning unit and after the implementation of one of the session in the public secondary school *Pilar Lorengar*, I would like to express that I give prominence to the position of students as centre of their learning process, the necessary optimism in teachers (Pygmalion effect) (Robert Manzano, 2007) and my final belief that I want to be a teacher for all my life.

Furthermore, in my view, it is relevant that assessment is constantly present on the board integrating it into the daily routine of the students in order to make them aware that the teacher will be monitoring and assessing them during the session. Moreover, in every session the activities should be varied, integrated and following a concrete timing. In order to start working, the students need to have a very clear aim in their minds, thus the teacher should give the instructions properly, making a good use of gestures to support the students' understanding and controlling the wait time, also correcting errors by using devices like the recasting technique for pronunciation and using the blackboard for visual support. Overall, I would like to insist on the relevance, from my point of view, of being not only a flexible teacher that will guide the students to reach their objectives but also to manage the classroom in a way in which their knowledge will be reflected in the teaching-learning process and making not only myself as a teacher but also themselves as students be satisfied with their own learning being able to see the utility of the English language and to be critical individuals in a society which is ever more difficult to live in.

Additionally, in my learning unit I have included the references which I used to create it. In my view, it is necessary to make it clear which have been the documents, books, articles, resources, in fact, that have given us ideas to make a more complete unit of work always bearing in mind the best way to foster our students' learning. In my case, the references used were the book that my students followed that is *English World 3* Burlington Books and a web page provided by my mentor in order to compare with different structures for a unit of work that is:

[http://www.quadernsdigitals.net/index.php?accionMenu=hemeroteca.VisualizaArticuloIU.visualiza&articulo\\_id=9874](http://www.quadernsdigitals.net/index.php?accionMenu=hemeroteca.VisualizaArticuloIU.visualiza&articulo_id=9874).

<sup>2</sup>On the other hand, the research report that has been selected for the analysis deals with how pronunciation is taught in different educational centres and I have done it in collaboration with my colleagues Maria Galán Sánchez and Eva Brinquis Serrano. In my case, the research was carried out in the public secondary school *Pilar Lorengar* while María Galán did it in the charter school *Maria Auxiliadora* and Eva Brinquis in the official school of languages *Fernando Lázaro Carreter*.

In order to start the analysis of the report, I have to say that the project has been divided following two models provided by the teacher entitled *Structuring your Research* (Campbell, A., McNamara, O. and Gilroy, P.: 2004) and *Traditional*

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<sup>2</sup> The Research Report can be found in Appendix 2.

*Research Report* (Brown, J.D. and Rodgers, T.S.: 2002). Accordingly, the research paper consists of the introduction that includes the literature review and the purpose, the methods that consists of the participants, the materials and the procedures, the results taken from the three educational schools, a discussion section, the conclusions, the references, the appendixes and the graphs including the data from the results.

To start with the introduction of the research report I have included a review of relevant literature that situates the reader within the field that is going to be analysed. After that, a statement of the purpose of the study that includes research questions or hypotheses is written. Thus, in my research report, I made a brief comment of the different methods used and supported by different authors to teach English throughout the years. Following Celce-Murcia et al. (1996: 2) “grammar and vocabulary have been much better understood by most language teachers than pronunciation, which began to be studied systematically shortly before the beginning of the twentieth century”. Likewise, If I have a look at the different teaching language methods and concretely concerning the grammar-translation and the reading based approaches, I can state that teachers give more prominence to grammar and lexis than to the spoken language in general and of pronunciation in particular. In these methods pronunciation was almost fully disregarded. However, not all the traditional methods have been based on grammar but others have taken oral aspects into account. For instance the Direct Method was not only focused on grammar but also used the target language in the classroom based on everyday vocabulary and communication. According to Brown (2001), “pronunciation was very important and it was taught through imitation and repetition.” In the 1940s and 1950s the Audiolingualism method was the main method to follow in which pronunciation is considered essential and it is taught from the beginning. Learning is based on creating the right response to a stimulus avoiding bad habits and making the students conscious of the importance of an accurate pronunciation. Later on, the Cognitive Approach focused again on grammar and vocabulary. This was because it was thought that getting a native-like pronunciation was unrealistic and could not be achieved being time better spent on teaching more learnable items, for instance grammar structures and words. New methods were created in the 1970s, for example the Silent Way in which the teacher spoke as little as possible using gestures to indicate the students what they should do. Nowadays, the Communicative Approach which emerged in the 1980s is the predominant approach to teach English as a foreign language. It holds that communication is the main goal of language and this should be central in the English teaching process. With the arrival of the Communicative Approach, a debate about the methodology of how pronunciation should be taught was born. People started to think that supra-segmental features were even more important than segmental ones. Moreover, in our days, the debate continues and pronunciation is considered to be taken into account to be worked in an integrated way during the lessons, but we all are conscious of the various difficulties that Spanish learners present dealing with pronunciation.

As I consider pronunciation to be one of the most difficult skills for Spanish students, I would like to focus on how pronunciation is worked on in each of the schools, analyzing and reflecting on the main reasons that can cause this

difficulty. Moreover, I have found this topic interesting not only because the issue of pronunciation is a good one to relate with my learning unit but also because I feel the need for self-improvement as a future language teacher since according to Michael J. Wallace: 1998 “People working in a profession like teaching may have more demanding expectations of themselves and their colleagues because they regard the process of professional development as continuous and on-going”.

Thus, we have taken advantage of our school placement in different Educational Centres in Zaragoza, such as the charter School *María Auxiliadora*, the public Secondary School *IES Pilar Lorengar* and the Official School of Languages *Fernando Lázaro Carreter* in order to be able to compare and contrast the teaching of pronunciation within their classrooms.

The charter school *María Auxiliadora* is located in the neighbourhood of *San José*. This is an area inhabited by working-class families from which a noticeable amount are disorganized. Therefore, this fact has consequences in the students’ results. Concerning the public Secondary School *IES Pilar Lorengar*, it is located in *La Jota* neighbourhood. In this area the inhabitants, are both a mixture of working-class and middle-class families, that have been living in the suburb for not many years. Generally speaking, students obtain good results except for some specific cases. In the case of the Official School of Languages *Fernando Lázaro Carreter*, it is located in the suburb of *Actur*. In this school there is a great variety of students, differing in age and occupation. Generally speaking, students attend the lessons voluntarily so the class development is really different from the other two schools described previously.

As is visible in the differences that exist between the educational centres in which we three made our school placement, we thought that we could obtain a reliable answer to the following questions:

- ❖ *How is pronunciation taught?*
- ❖ *Are the existing methods enough and effective?*
- ❖ *Why is pronunciation a failure in most of the cases?*
- ❖ *Which devices would we propose in order to solve this problematic situation?*
- ❖ *Which would be the appropriate suggestions to achieve an improvement in pronunciation and to make students aware of the importance of it?*

This research attempts to focus both on the teachers’ and students’ views regarding how pronunciation is worked in the English foreign language classes in secondary education and in language schools. Consequently, from the charter school *María Auxiliadora* we chose a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> CSE with 24 students from which 11 were girls and 13 were boys, including a Native American student. A high level of immigrant students attends this class, above all Latino-American boys and girls who, in general, have some problems with behaviour. We decided to select this group because it was a numerous class with several students with not very good behaviour and not a high level of English. Besides, the fact of having a native student in the group made us believe that it would help in our teaching placement and consequently, to our research project. We also selected the group of 4<sup>th</sup> CSE diversification composed by only 13 students, in which the vast majority were girls and there were just 3 boys. We chose this group because we thought that they could have special educational needs regarding the

pronunciation of the English language. Moreover, we wanted to include a group of this age in our research project so as to get more mature samples from students in order to show variation among groups. Apart from that, we analyzed one class-group from the public secondary school *Pilar Lorengar*. It was a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> CSE compound by 18 students in which boys are predominant. We wanted to work with this group because we already had a sample of 2<sup>nd</sup> CSE and 4<sup>th</sup> CSE, thus we wanted to include different levels to enrich the content of our research. To finish with the participants, from the Official Language School *Fernando Lázaro Carreter*, the students chosen belonged to two different groups of upper intermediate levels. One of them was compound by 25 students while the other one had 23. Their ages ranged from 17 to 50 years old. The two groups had similar characteristics. They were very motivated to learn English, specially the language pronunciation since they had to pass an oral exam at the end of the academic year.

These groups were selected in order to analyse their views on pronunciation during the English as a foreign language classes at secondary schools and official schools of languages within the Spanish educational system. Furthermore, I would like to mention that these were the groups that we had access to since if we had had access to more groups, this study would have presented more variables.

In order to carry out our Research, we designed a series of materials like questionnaires for both the students and the teachers and handed them out to be completed. The questionnaires elaborated for the students had a total of nine questions focused on the importance of pronunciation in the subject of English, the role of teachers and their own role to improve it, their motivation to learn the language and its pronunciation, the reasons why they are afraid of speaking in English and finally their self-assessment concerning English pronunciation and the measures to improve it.

Instead, the questionnaires addressed to teachers contained eight questions dealing with the methods used to teach pronunciation, the use of RP and other varieties of English during the lessons, the effectiveness of the materials used and the exercises included in them, the possibility of using additional materials to teach pronunciation, devices and strategies that the teachers use to improve the pronunciation of students, alternatives to solve problems with pronunciation, visible difficulties during the lessons to teach pronunciation and new ideas that they would add in order to achieve more effective learning.

Both models were elaborated in Spanish in order to obtain the most reliable answers as possible because for students it is not easy to answer in English and our aim was to obtain real opinions from them. However, we have included these questionnaires translated into English. The main reasons for including these questions in the questionnaires handed in, were that we wanted to reflect on the teachers and students' opinions, and consequently, propose useful solutions for real problems that are affecting the teaching of the pronunciation skills in our lessons. In order to achieve the goal mentioned above, we decided to create open questions so as to select the most relevant information letting the students express themselves in an open way with no pressures. Additionally, during the last week of our school placement we were observing the way in

which our mentors worked with pronunciation during the sessions, taking notes of the most relevant details.

The procedures used to distribute the questionnaires to both the students and teachers were different in each school. On the one hand, regarding the charter school *María Auxiliadora*, María Galán put it into practice during the last week of our school placement and she used two different sessions to hand out the questionnaires to the students of 2<sup>nd</sup> CSE and 4<sup>th</sup> CSE diversification. Nevertheless, if we refer to the public secondary school *IES Pilar Lorengar*, I provided the students of 3<sup>rd</sup> CSE with the questionnaires using one session of my school placement checking the student doubts and, at the same time, answering them. Finally, in accordance with the procedure followed in the Official School of Languages *Fernando Lázaro Carreter*, Eva Brinquis provided firstly the questionnaires to students of the first group, and then to students of the second group. The process took place during the last week of the School placement, and it was the same in both groups; before handing out the questionnaires to students, Eva explained the purpose and the importance of these questionnaires, giving some information to students, such as the fact that they are connected to a research report at the University, and that the results were going to be analyzed and evaluated for one of the subjects of this Master.

Apart from handing in the questionnaires, all the members of the group dedicated the penultimate week of our school placements to observe how our different mentors integrated pronunciation in their lessons. Once our school placements finished, we all met and contributed with the data we acquired during our teaching sessions. To organize all the information, we elaborated a graph including several blocks related to the questions that we included in the questionnaire. Thus, we analyzed all the questionnaires completed in the different schools in order to compare the results obtained and to show them in a more visual way by means of the graph.

Concerning the results obtained during our observation period in our school placements, we have included several graphs and the questionnaires as appendixes of our research. Additionally, in section 3 the concrete results from both the students and teachers are included and further explained in point number 4 of my research which is entitled *Discussion*. Accordingly, I am going to refer to this point because, from my point of view, the results are further and more completely explained there. Thus, as general results we can affirm that on the one hand, students think that pronunciation is not worked on enough in the different educational schools where this research was done, all the students except two consider the English language important and are conscious of the relevance that it has all over the world. Most of the participants are optimistic because they position themselves in a high score regarding their pronunciation, however, the students in the school of languages, that coincidentally are the most mature, are more realistic about their pronunciation and think they must improve it. Most of the students believe that in order to improve their pronunciation it should be worked on more during the lessons using a different methodology, most of the participants felt embarrassed when speaking English because of their fear to make mistakes, but, at the same time, they are conscious of the fact that they are obliged to speak if their aim is to improve their pronunciation.



Unlike, concerning the teachers interviewed, we can state that all of them think that the pronunciation is not worked on enough during the sessions and the textbooks they use contain few exercises to work on it. Moreover, they confirm that they have to use additional materials if they decide to work on it and all of them affirm that there are too many students to work with the language and the sessions that generally last 50 minutes are short.

Moreover, after having analysed all the results of the questionnaires and evaluated all the data that we have collected throughout all our research, I can conclude that it is difficult to make the students pronounce English brilliantly, but not impossible. There are lots of resources and mechanisms in order to develop and improve this skill, and I, as a future teacher, will make this possible using innovative methodologies and new strategies which are going to be discussed later on. Also an additional difficulty is that although nowadays we are immersed in the communicative approach to English as a foreign language, in real practice grammar, lexis and the written skills are covered daily during the sessions at the expense of oral skills in most of the cases. Furthermore, the lack of confidence of some teachers to explain the pronunciation concepts to the students and the lack of organization when integrating pronunciation in their lessons are other reasons that contribute to the problems with pronunciation in the students. In brief, I have to say that I find this research an interesting device because “these answers are usually recorded in some way so that they become available for subsequent reflection and analysis” (Michael J. Wallace: 1998).

After having described both projects, I would like to critically reflect about the existing relationship between them. First of all, both projects were created with the data acquired during my school placement in the public school *Pilar Lorengar* and both of them are an important source of knowledge and practice for my training as a teacher of English as a foreign language. First of all because the learning unit defines me as the future teacher I want to be, that is, a guide for my students being not only communicative, flexible, coherent, comprehensible but also a good manager of the class and, second, the research report that is a necessary reference for my ongoing professional development.

Concerning the way in which pronunciation is worked on in the different educational centres, as can be seen in the conclusions of my research report, pronunciation is not worked on enough in the different educational schools where the research was done. Consequently, this idea is reflected in my learning unit where we find exercises related with pronunciation that focus on the differentiation of short and long vowels and diphthongs. However, I would like to express that the activities included in my learning unit are based on the communicative approach and cooperative learning in order to indirectly improve the students' pronunciation providing them with the opportunity to interact and practice the English language while the teacher corrects their errors using devices like the well-known *recasting*. Thus, the student will not only be able to communicate in English but also see the usefulness of pronunciation in communication, an idea that the students commented on in the questionnaires analysed. Overall, I would like to state that, as a future English teacher, I am in favour of including more pronunciation activities in my future learning units

using innovative methodologies and new strategies to teach pronunciation, prolonging the English sessions to 90' or 120' and suggesting that the publishing companies include more phonetic exercises in their books in order to transmit to the students the importance of pronunciation when communication is established and the means to improve it.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE**

To start with, I would like to reflect about the importance of education in my life. There are several reasons why I am doing the master in education. First of all, I consider the educational field as one of the most important pillars of society. Moreover, I do not only believe in the student's learning but also in the student's integral education. Likewise, I conceive this master as the path that has helped me to find the type of teacher that I want to be, that is to say, not only a communicative, flexible and comprehensible one but also a good manager of the class.

On the one hand, concerning the learning unit created during my school placement in the public school *Pilar Lorengar*, I have realized that as a teacher I must always reflect about my tasks and my contributions to the student's learning. Consequently, as a teacher, I should constantly look for new methodology, techniques, resources and topics that motivate my students, always bearing in mind that my main educational aim is to help the students in their own formation. Similarly, I find it absolutely necessary to control the resources and material presented and student's attention in the lessons as well as time on task if I want to contribute to their education.

As a future teacher, I strongly believe in the importance of designing effective learning activities. These are aimed at activating previous knowledge while helping to encourage the students to participate in the lessons motivating them and making them autonomous individuals and participants in their own learning process. In order to achieve all of this, I need to be a flexible and empathetic teacher who reflects upon her teaching and is conscious of the varying difficulties of her students. I need to foster the positive attitudes of students and tackle the possible lack of interest in others to improve. Apart from that, I consider it essential to have a good presence in class to manage and control the group being conscious of when and how to use L1, Spanish in this case, only to help the students to understand the information previously given in L2.

Dealing with the different groups I have observed and the session from my learning unit that I could implement during my school placement, I can state that I have learnt about the relevance of innovative methodology like cooperative learning which involves the students in their learning process, brainstorming ideas or interacting with each other so as to improve the class spirit. Furthermore, I would like to concentrate on the difference established between groups that belonged to the same year, concretely 2<sup>nd</sup> Bachillerato A and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bachillerato C, because I have also learnt from this. The differences lie not only in methodology applied but also in the response given by the students. It is neither better nor worse, it is simply a different way of working with them. Overall, in groups like these, helping the students providing scaffolding like showing outlines or examples of the writing activities becomes absolutely necessary.

Apart from that, as a proposal for the future, I would improve several sections from my learning unit. First, I would include a preparatory session for the students to self-assess their final tasks in Appendix 6, Session 6, Writing. After that, I would create a rubric for the assessment of this activity in order to clarify

the most relevant concepts to be valued. Later on, I would check and monitor that the corrections have been made in the appropriate way. Finally, I would apply my criteria as a teacher although I consider this a proper activity to learn how to assess their classmates under the cooperative work principle. Additionally, I would make good use of gestures to support understanding and measure and adjust the wait time, I would correct errors by recasting, I would make a good use of the blackboard for visual support and I would integrate a variety of activities in timing explaining to the students clearly the aim of the tasks and keeping assessment constantly on board. Moreover, I would be more concrete dealing with the objectives and contents in my unit and I would invite the rest of the teachers to use new methodology like cooperative learning and the communicative approach because I consider that more can be achieved working as a team.

In contrast, dealing with the research report created with the observation done during our school placements in the public school *Pilar Lorengar* (María Cuello Sánchez), the charter school *María Auxiliadora* (María Galán Sánchez) and the official school of languages *Fernando Lázaro Carreter* (Eva Brinquis Serrano), I can conclude that it is difficult to make the students pronounce English brilliantly, but not impossible. There are lots of resources and mechanisms in order to develop and improve this point of their English language learning. As a future teacher, I will make this possible using innovative methodologies and new strategies that can be stated as future proposals like extending the time of the English sessions to 120' or 90' so that the teaching can be more appropriate and the lessons more useful and, consequently, more efficient because a lot of time is wasted at the beginning and at the end of the lessons, when the students take out their books from their bags, they sit down correctly and finally are calmed down. This would entail preparing sessions to work only and specifically pronunciation, teaching more phonetic rules, doing oral activities with the phonetic transcript, using Internet links with phonetic activities, reading aloud and giving them immediate feedback. Likewise, to create a *Pronunciation Booklet* during the sessions, that is to say, a pronunciation dictionary adding words seen during the lessons and classifying them in sections depending on the phonemes. Every day, they would have to write down at least 5 words with the same phoneme in the booklet. Then, students could share their booklets with other classmates so as to have more words. At the end of the month, the students who have the most complete Pronunciation booklets would get an extra point in the exam. I think it is a good tool in order to make the students know about the different phonemes and their pronunciation and, at the same time, motivate them to get the extra point. Furthermore, I would propose to do pronunciation exams or oral exams in order to evaluate specific aspects of pronunciation. Finally, concerning the educational centre, it would be a good idea to create some pronunciation courses, outside the lessons, as something “extra” providing the students with other methods to study the English pronunciation.

In summary, after my school placement, the implementation of a session from my learning unit and of several sessions in different groups, I consider it essential to make the students feel they are important in their educational process providing them with a series of responsibilities and personal autonomy.

Additionally, the aspect I most like is the good atmosphere within the classroom, concretely, the attention and motivation shown by the students in their high levels of participation and the visible commitment between teachers. Thus, in order to achieve all these, as a teacher I must make use of new methodology and innovative techniques like cooperative learning and the communicative approach, the use of effective instructional strategies, the use of effective management strategies and the use of effective curriculum design (Marzano, Robert J. : 2003). All of these apart from working with the pronunciation in an integrated and well-structured way always bearing in mind the positive attitude that to make the students pronounce English brilliantly is difficult but not impossible.

Generally speaking, I have to mention the utility of this master that has helped me to become the kind of the teacher that I want to be, that is to say, a flexible, communicative, effective, understanding and comprehensible teacher. In brief, a guide for the students that will lead them to achieve their dreams like mine was to be an English teacher. Furthermore, I am absolutely convinced that I was born to be a teacher and I am feeling more and more confident to work in education. During my school placement I had the opportunity to self-assess as a teacher and thanks to the support of my mentors from the university and from the secondary school I can conclude that my lessons worked really well, students were motivated and they liked the activities done in class. Moreover, most of the days I taught, I could observe the happy faces of students and I felt a huge satisfaction because I was not only educating them but I was helping to achieve their aims. For me teaching is not only a job, it is also a passion, a passion that you show to your students while transmitting contents creating individuals and preparing them to live in a future society because if you, as a teacher, believe that your students will improve and achieve an aim, they will do it.

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