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Improving Pronunciation Skills Through Self-Recordings

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Research Report submitted

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### **Abstract**

This research study analyzes the impact of self-recordings on the improvement of English pronunciation skills in eight graders of a private institution located in Tenjo. This study consisted of ten workshops where self-recordings, questionnaires and journals were used as the main instruments to collect data. Regarding the findings of this project, the researcher observed that self-recordings were an innovative tool to motivate learners to improve their pronunciation skills. Furthermore, the use of self-recordings prompted learners' interest to self-monitor their own learning process.

*Key words:* Pronunciation, self-recordings, autonomy, awareness, improvement.

### **Resumen**

Este proyecto de investigación analiza el impacto de las auto grabaciones en el mejoramiento de la pronunciación inglesa de los estudiantes de grado octavo de una institución privada ubicada en Tenjo. Este estudio se desarrolló en diez sesiones durante las cuales audio grabaciones, cuestionarios y diarios de campo fueron implementados como los instrumentos principales de recolección de información. Teniendo en cuenta los hallazgos de este proyecto, la investigadora observó que las auto grabaciones fueron una herramienta innovadora para motivar a los estudiantes a mejorar sus habilidades de pronunciación. Además, el uso de auto grabaciones promovió el interés de los estudiantes de auto monitorear su proceso de aprendizaje.

*Palabras claves:* Pronunciación, auto- grabaciones, autonomía, conciencia, mejoramiento.

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## **Chapter I. Statement of the Problem**

### **Introduction**

Generally, when language teachers reflect on their learners' language learning process, the majority of them conclude that the most common difficulties learners face are related to the lack of pronunciation awareness. When learners speak, they cannot do it fluently; they are not able to pronounce all the phonemes properly (Fraser, 2001).

Accordingly, the researcher noticed and observed during her classes that her learners did not feel comfortable to speak naturally and fluently; they faced a great difficulty when pronouncing words which begin with s\_, w\_ and th\_. Therefore, the researcher decided to examine their language learning process and to set up an action plan to help them overcome their weaknesses in terms of pronunciation. For this reason, this action research was designed to investigate the learners' cognitive and pronunciation level.

### **Justification**

Nowadays, communication skills are essential for conducting business, politics and to participate in the socio-cultural dimensions of everyday life. Language is the means to interact and exchange ideas between people. Thus, language skills are critical to effective interaction and communication with other people across various aspects of life. The school as the center of education is responsible to provide students with appropriate tools and strategies to use language as the means of communication (Callier, 1995). Therefore, the researcher's interest was focused on the knowledge of the English language as a whole and the development of the four language skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening, to

provide students with the integrated language competencies. With the goal to support the development of language proficiency that would include clear and comprehensible oral communication, the focus had to be on pronunciation practice.

Considering that the researcher had observed that her learners repeatedly experienced difficulties in producing certain English sounds correctly, she concentrated on the enhancement of speaking skills with emphasis on pronunciation. To that end, self-recording strategies were employed to allow her students to identify their pronunciation mistakes. It provided a way to reflect on their personal needs in terms of speaking competencies. Thus, thanks to this research study, students would be able not only to acquire the knowledge at a basic level but also to be critical and analytic about their own learning process, which is one of the language learning outcomes of the institution where the research took place.

### **Research question and objectives**

This research focused on the improvement of pronunciation skills by the use of self-recordings, in eighth graders of a private institution located in Tenjo. This study examined the possible answers to the following research question:

What is the effect of self-recordings on students' pronunciation?

By answering the research question the researcher intended to accomplish the following objective:

- ❖ To determine the effect of self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation skills.



## **Benefits**

Considering the problem mentioned above, the possible benefits for the teachers and students were the following:

*Teachers' benefits:* This action research was a good opportunity for the teacher to improve on the teaching strategies which affected her students' learning process and outcomes. She became aware of the need to set up an action plan. In addition, the teacher could reflect on her own teaching practice and the areas which needed improvement. This action research helped to refine the methodology implemented during each lesson and the learning outcomes for the course.

*Students' benefits:* Learners could benefit by improving their learning experience and results. They were able to both acquire new language skills as well as to reflect on their learning in terms of its progress and outcomes. Also, they felt motivated to learn English language in a more innovative way using new technological tools (windows' voice recording option), which fostered their interest and improved their performance.

Regarding the aspects mentioned above, this document contains the following chapters, which explain the steps and components of this action research project:

Chapter two: It introduces the theoretical constructs which supported this project. Those notions and resources enhanced the teacher's perspective on the statement of the problem and the action plan she implemented to improve her students language learning process in terms of pronunciation. Besides, this chapter contains a short review of previous studies related to the topic of this project.

Chapter three: This chapter describes the research design. Accordingly, the participants, the context, the researcher's role, the ethical considerations and the instruments of this action research project are presented.

Chapter four: It contains the instructional design based on the theoretical constructs which support it, such as the critical listening approach. Also, this chapter presents the instructional goals and objectives and the instructional methods which were applied during the project.

Chapter five: This chapter presents the data collected and analyzed in the study. The resulting findings are presented here as well.

Chapter six: It summarizes all the information and the key points described in the document. Conclusions, further research recommendations and the pedagogical implications are presented as well.

## **Chapter II. Literature Review**

Nowadays, the English language is used around the world as the medium to interact and establish agreements and commitments amongst people and nations (Callier, 1995). Oral communication is often part of that global dialogue. Hence, pronunciation practice becomes a vital aspect of the English language learning process. Comprehensible speech has a great influence on effective communication; applying clear and correct pronunciation allows speakers to avoid potential misunderstandings and confusion (Callier, 1995). In fact, the task of English language teachers includes not only preparing their learners to apply grammar rules when writing, but also to make learners being aware of inherent features of the English language such as pronunciation and phonetics which will enable them to communicate effectively with others.

A number of constructs related to the research question needed to be considered for the study. The first essential construct to this research was autonomy, which proved to be an indispensable ability of the participant learners of this study. There are two authors which were considered in the discussion of this concept: Holec (1981) and Little (1994). The second notion was that of motivation – another critical aspect in a language learning process. Motivation is vital since it sustains learners' interest and persistence in the often lengthy process of language learning. If there is lack of learners' motivation, the learning process will not be successful. Dörnyei's motivation theory (2009) was selected to support this construct. Finally, considering the researcher's observations and the identified educational problem, it was necessary to look for theory to support the lack of learners' pronunciation

awareness and strategies which help the teacher to teach English pronunciation. The authors considered to explain those aspects were Fraser (2001 - 2006) and Hancock (2007).

### **Autonomy**

Holec (1981) explained the relationship between autonomy and the second language acquisition process. The author defined autonomy as the ability to be aware of one's own learning process. It needs to be acquired during the formal academic sessions throughout the feedback provided by the teacher, in which learners evaluate themselves in terms of their strengths and weaknesses and establish an action plan to improve on them. It needs to be a natural process rather than following a requirement. In fact, learner's autonomy is related to the idea that one of the several functions of education is preparing the learner to assume an active and participative role in social events.

Moreover, autonomy is a process in which learners need to accept their own responsibility for carrying out a learning process, which depends on two aspects - the metacognitive level and the self-assessment process related to the emotional aspects and attitudes of each learner. Therefore, it is not just analyzing academic process and success, but also considering the external factors which motivate learners to acquire knowledge and apply it in various contexts, not only in the academic setting. Additionally, Holec explained that being autonomous is required at the moment of carrying out a learning activity. Autonomous learners take the responsibility for making and establishing own feedback and reflecting on the learning process that they are involved in. They have the ability to be critical and thoughtful, to be aware of aspects they need to improve on. For this reason, being autonomous positively impacts their motivation; it is easier for such autonomous

learners to improve their language and cognitive skills. They do it consciously and thus enhance the effectiveness and success of this process.

Besides, with regard to being autonomous during a second language learning process, it is essential to mention that successful language acquisition requires practice in communicative situations. Consequently, learners should practice their language skills whenever possible, not only in academic contexts but also in socio-cultural settings using language as the means to interact. In this sense, three pedagogical aspects need to be considered (Holec, 1981):

1. Learner's involvement: it is necessary to encourage learners to assume the responsibility for both the metacognitive and the affective aspect of learning.
2. Learner's reflection: it motivates and guides learners to reflect on their own learning process, at the moment of planning, monitoring and evaluating it. Also, it supports metacognitive processes.
3. Appropriate target language use: it promotes the use of target language as the main means to interact.

Having said that, it is important to discuss what role teachers need to assume to foster autonomy in the classroom. It is essential that teachers promote the use of the target language during all the lessons as the means to communicate. In addition, learners need to evaluate themselves and their peers. It is a way to involve learners in the reflection and analysis of language acquisition. Finally, the teacher needs to encourage learners to establish

personal goals related to their own experience and motivate them to develop and achieve those goals.

According to Little (1994), autonomy is a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning. It is a strategy to foster critical reflection, decision making and independent action. In fact, the author stated that teaching by telling and showing is not enough. It is necessary that learners are actively involved in doing in order to apply the acquired knowledge. Hence, during the language learning process, teachers must design and implement activities in which learners feel the need to use the language as a means to interact. As a result, they will acquire the ability to adapt the language to have an effective communication. Also, learners will recognize the importance of assuming different roles in a communicative situation.

Finally, the author stated that the language acquisition process needs to be complemented with the guidance of the teacher and parents.

Benson (2011) defined the autonomy as the capacity to take control over one's own learning (p.2). In fact, there is a condition for the development of autonomy which is related to the role of the teacher and the strategies used in the classroom to prompt independence among learners. If the teacher provides learners with activities, action plans, guidance and feedback, there would be a probability to have autonomous learners.

Regarding the aspects mentioned above, the author stated that when learners become autonomous they also acquire the ability to be responsible and critical members of the community in which they live.

## Motivation

According to the theory proposed by Dörnyei (2009), motivation is the initial step of any language learning process. In this sense, motivation becomes a fact which can lead success or failure. The author stated that it is essential to plan learning activities around goals appropriate to the learners' level and prior knowledge. Learners should maintain consistent levels of motivation throughout the whole learning process.

The L2 motivational self-system theory was proposed by Dörnyei in order to create new strategies which can be used by language teachers as a means to foster motivation among their learners. The author proposed a motivation system as a dynamic approach of linking the human self with human action. The creation of a self-image allows learners to be aware of the way in which they want to present themselves. For this reason, the reflection about *the possible self* is necessary (Dörnyei, 2009). This reflection is a strategy to identify the goals of the learning process. Once these goals are identified, it is essential that learners reflect on the implementation of the knowledge acquired in real-life contexts and situations, which allows them to set their personal goals according to what they want to achieve.

Moreover, Dörnyei (2010) stated that the *L2 motivational self-system* is composed of three aspects: (1) *Ideal L2 self*, which refers to the L2-specific aspect of one's *ideal self* and the qualities the learner would like to have, (2) *Ought-to L2 self* which refers to the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess to avoid possible negative outcomes, (3) *L2 Learning experience*, which concerns the factors which impact the immediate learning environment and experience (p.79).

Furthermore, in the context of education, the *possible-self* refers to the representation of the characteristics that an individual would ideally like to possess, namely a representation of hopes, aspirations and wishes. In addition to the creation of the possible-self, there is another aspect known as the *ought-to self*. It refers to the abilities that one believes one ought to possess.

Finally, the author observed that there are some strategies such as, the construction of the Ideal L2, the imagery enhancement, making the ideal L2 self-plausible, developing an action plan, activating the ideal L2, considering failure to enhance and generate attractive learners' visions of the learning process. It is a way to motivate them and increase the elaborateness and vividness of self-relevant imagery in the students (Dörnyei, 2009).

Regarding the aspects mentioned above, motivation is a relevant fact for this research. This becomes a factor which makes learners feel the security to develop the language learning process consciously. In this sense, when they reflect on their progress and advance they can make a direct connection between the academic preparation and the effect it has on their real life contexts.

## **Pronunciation**

With respect to the learners' need to acquire pronunciation awareness, which allows them to communicate effectively with others, the theories described below are the most relevant to the research objectives.

According to Fraser (2001), pronunciation is one of the most problematic features of the English language for both teachers and learners. Although it can be taught and learned effectively, in most cases teachers are not trained to teach pronunciation and the lack of that



knowledge is evidenced. Fraser identified this based on her class observations. The purpose of her research was to analyze the causes of incorrect English pronunciation and to give recommendations and suggestions to English teachers, about the way in which pronunciation should be taught. In this sense, she proposed a method known as *Critical Listening approach*.

Considering some classes' observations Fraser argued that people tend to experience difficulties with their pronunciation. They are not capable of interacting with native speakers, due to the fact that they cannot speak naturally. This also affects the language learning process in terms of developing the four skills successfully and effectively. Accordingly, critical listening approach is focused on the idea that it is not sufficient for the teacher to just provide more pronunciation input to the learner. Instead, the teacher should guide them to improve their pronunciation by modelling it. For this reason, teachers should select appropriate materials and implement them in the pronunciation practice. Those need to be related to the specific pronunciation needs of the learners and they should also encourage learners to improve pronunciation through the reflection based on their strengths and weaknesses. In fact, each teacher needs to reflect on how the materials help learners to improve pronunciation. It is going to allow the employment of strategies focused on the real learner's cognitive needs and set up an action plan to overcome pronunciation problems specific to the learner.

Furthermore, teachers tend to implement activities and methodologies to teach pronunciation that are not related to the direct context in which learners interact, which negatively affects their foreign language learning process. Often teachers have to develop

their classes using textbooks in which they find activities that are not relevant to students and therefore not successful and effective in improving pronunciation. For instance, the using phonetics symbols could turn out to be a complicated and ineffective way to teach pronunciation, due to the fact that learners might not have the required level of understanding of how to use these symbols (Fraser, 2006).

In addition, Hancock (2007) presents some strategies teachers can use to teach pronunciation. He focused on learners' pronunciation needs and the difficulties they face in recognizing the phonemes of the target language. Hancock explains the most common mistakes EFL learners tend to make such as the pronunciation of English vowels, the regular verbs *\_ed* and *\_d* endings, and the words starting with *s*.

Hancock (2007) also suggests practical exercises in which learners need to recognize the sound of each phoneme read individually. Then they need to read the complete word considering the sound changes that each phoneme undergoes as a result of being read as a phonetic whole. To improve pronunciation sub-skill, the author argues, students should read full sentences after having practiced the pronunciation of individual words. It is an exercise which allows learners to be aware of some spoken language features such as intonation, stress and accents, which are the aspects that determine the effectiveness and success of oral communication.

All the activities proposed by the author are related to the development of effective pronunciation skills. Those strategies may promote not only learners' autonomy but also the awareness of their own learning processes. According to the author, the use of self-recordings is one of the most useful strategies to apply during the pronunciation learning process. It allows learners to adapt new methods to reflect on their own strengths and

weaknesses in terms of pronunciation. Those strategies are relevant to this research and its goal to overcome learners' pronunciation weaknesses through the acquisition of learning awareness.

### **State of the art**

Taking into account the subject matter of this action research, it was necessary to look for former research studies which explored learning pronunciation, the usage of self-recordings, as well as learner autonomy. Some local and international studies are presented below.

Rengifo (2009) affirms that karaoke was an encouraging activity to improve English pronunciation of adult students of a private language institute. The researcher decided to implement songs as the main tool to carry out the project. The instruments employed to collect data in that study included video recordings, interviews and teacher's diary. Those tools were selected by the researcher in order to gather quantitative data about the characteristics of learners' improvement. In addition, Rengifo interviewed the participants to collect meaningful qualitative data; the interview approach allowed the researcher to be more personal and to establish a rapport with all his students. He was able to collect spontaneous data in which he could observe facial movements and gestures and the way of responding. The use of video recorders was appropriate for that purpose. By the end of the project, the results showed that learners became aware of oral aspects such as pronunciation and intonation; they tried to improve them when they spoke. Also, learners considered

karaoke as a useful and fun strategy to learn. They expressed that they learned different features of the English language such as the pronunciation of minimal pairs and vocabulary.

Urrutía and Vega (2006) stated that games were an effective strategy to improve speaking skills of learners in a public school located south of Bogota. During the problem identification stage, learners felt inhibited during speaking activities because they were afraid of possible criticism and jokes about the way they spoke. They focused the project on the implementation of some strategies such as games, workshops, role plays and songs to encourage tenth graders to improve their speaking skills. By the end of the study, the results showed that learners were able to participate in oral activities in a more natural and confident way. Also, they were able to communicate between them maintaining solidarity and collaboration.

Besides, Walker (2000) affirmed that non-native speakers experience difficulties in producing certain features and sounds of the target language when they speak. They show the influence of their L1 in some phonemes, such as the words which start with *s* (for instance, sport, spider, and space), the past of the regular verbs endings *\_ed* and *\_d* (looked, watched, played). Therefore, he created a strategy to improve his learner's pronunciation sub-skill; it was the use of learners' recordings. The idea was that learners were supposed to work in pairs. They had to record some words and phrases given by the teacher. Then, they were supposed to interchange their recordings with their partners. Once they received those recordings, each learner had to analyze the mand provide the feedback to his/her peer. The author stated that the use of recordings was an effective strategy to foster motivation and collaborative work between learners. The recordings were found helpful in creating a new

learning environment in which learners were able to evaluate their partners. They did not feel concerned about making mistakes because they felt the support of their partners not the teacher's pressure. The author said that the strategy was successful in terms of pronunciation improvement. At the end most of the learners recognized the sounds and pronounced them properly when they spoke.

During their research study Chacon and Perez (2010) found that podcast was a resource available on internet to create audio notes. For this reason, they decided to analyze the effect of the use of this tool in their learner's language acquisition process. They created an action plan focused on the development of virtual lessons in which participants had to record their voices talking about different topics worked in class. The authors stated that podcasts were a useful tool to enhance communicative skills in their learners. They acquired a high level of expression and oral comprehension. Also, it was a useful strategy for them to foster autonomy among their learners.

Finally, Salazar (2013) affirmed that English pronunciation is a fact that should be practiced by teachers and learners. In this sense, the author implemented an action plan which consisted in thirty eight activities focused on the development of pronunciation skills of beginners' level at a public institution located in Samaniego (Nariño). To develop the action plan, the author used activities such as dialogues, sketches and performances which became a useful tool for her to observe and evidence that learner had difficulties to pronounce some specific phonemes. At the end of the study the researcher evidenced that learners had improved their pronunciation skills.

### **Chapter III. Research Design**

#### **Introduction**

This research study investigated the impact of employing self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation skills. It was framed into the action research methodology, which is appropriate for the human sciences (Merriam, 2009). Action research approaches social problems from the point of view of the members of a specific community whose main objective is the creation of collective knowledge. According to Cohen (2007), teachers investigate and improve their work through the evidences provided by the action research data. It is the way in which teachers can reflect on their own teaching practice and subsequently improve it.

Regarding the action research process, it allows the researcher to reflect and analyze own professional practice while being neutral and objective (Wallace, 1998). The data obtained during the study, indeed, become the evidence of many issues and practices which affect not only teacher's professional practice but also of the impact of the applied methodologies on the students. Hence, during an action research process the researcher should be focused on three main aspects to develop an effective reflection: the perfection of practice, the understanding of what practice is and the understanding of the situation in which practice takes place (Carr and Kemis, 1986).

Taking into account the statements above coupled with the objectives and the goals of this action research, the project was framed as a qualitative study. Thanks to the qualitative data analysis, the researcher obtained several findings which became the starting

point of reflection about her own teaching practice. The objective then was to analyze a process based on real facts more than presenting statistics. The project aimed to collect and analyze data and then reflect on human behavior; it was the way to observe how people understand their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

### **Context**

This action research project was carried out at a private institution. It is a trilingual school -English, Chinese and Spanish- located in Tenjo (Cundinamarca). According to the objectives and aims established at the institution, the school seeks to be the leader of the trilingual institutions in Bogota, which is characterized by the education of children and teenagers with clear and coherent real-life projects based on the transformation of their social environment. Its mission is the formative and integral education of assertive, proactive and transcendent learners that will be able to maintain their social customs and identity hence allowing them to interact as successful citizens of the world. Accordingly, the school promotes the Colombian culture and the international cultures such as Colombian, American, Chinese and British. Therefore, the institution facilitates exchanges between Colombia, the United States, China and England by offering different cultural and academic services such as English and Chinese language courses, tours around touristic places and real immersions in the foreign cultures.

The school has focused its English syllabus on the acquisition of the English language through the development of the four language skills, and on the promotion of real interaction using the English language as a means to communicate. It is not just focused on the language acquisition but it also promotes the practice of language in real-life contexts

and situations which allow learners to be aware of the language use. For this reason, it is divided into two kinds of methodologies. The first approach is the English classes in which students develop and apply different activities proposed by selected textbooks and workbooks. During those lessons the teacher is in charge of explaining the topics in a different way by the use of technological tools such as video, the internet, and podcasts. Also, to complement those strategies and activities, the students read a series of literature books, which expand their cultural knowledge about the foreign language. Secondly, the lab classes are developed through the use of Dyned program; a software which supports the development and improvement of listening and speaking skills. At the beginning of Dyned's academic process, the learners take a placement test to evaluate their English language proficiency level. The program then considers those results and according to them establishes the academic path students should follow. As a result, the program adjusts courses, activities and materials to the student levels, scaffolding them between the easiest and the most difficult ones. In addition, students should develop speaking exercises in which they record their voices. Subsequently, students listen to their own recordings to identify intonation and pronunciation mistakes.

### **Participants**

The research study was conducted with a pre-intermediate group of 21 14-year old; nine male and twelve female EFL Colombian students in eighth grade at a private institution



located in Tenjo (Cundinamarca). According to the levels of the <sup>1</sup>-Common European Framework-, the participants' language level is A2. They are capable of comprehending sentences and common expressions related to their immediate contexts (family, school, friendships, etc.). Also, they can communicate and share information about their families. They can describe aspects and features of their immediate environments using simple language. In terms of the writing skill, especially the grammar sub-skill, learners are able to use simple and continuous tenses such as past, present and future. Finally, most of the vocabulary they use is related to the interaction with their family, friends, teachers and classmates.

### **Learner's needs**

### **Linguistic needs**

To identify and assess learners' linguistic needs, the researcher applied some oral activities such as presentations and role plays in which pronunciation difficulties and mistakes were evident. The most common difficulties were evidenced when learners use words with s\_, w\_ and th\_ beginnings. Students evidently required more speaking exercises in which they felt they needed to use speech to communicate. They needed to acquire the awareness of oral features of the English language such as pronunciation, intonation and stress so that they could produce comprehensible and clear performances in role-plays and oral presentations.

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❖ <sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp). January 2014.

### **Affective needs**

It is very important to consider that the participants were adolescents. Consequently, during this stage their attitude required more attention due to the fact that the learners start to be aware of their immediate environments and contexts in which they interact. Adolescent students often develop critical thoughts and points of view about the dynamics and learning situations in which they are immersed (Erikson, 1968). Also, they tend to act somewhat rebellious or negative, often opposing the rules of the contexts in which they interact, especially family and school.

### **Cognitive needs**

Learners during the adolescent stage have a great ability to enhance their knowledge (Erikson, 1968). For this reason, it was necessary to expose them to the development of activities such as games, role plays, performances which allowed them to acquire English as a foreign language naturally. These kinds of activities encouraged them to be critical and analytical of their own processes considering their strengths and weaknesses. To support their involvement, they were encouraged to establish and create their own action plans.

### **Researcher's role**

The researcher was the teacher of the class under investigation. To address the key research question, the researcher carried out a reflective process focused on how learners overcame their barriers and weaknesses in terms of pronunciation. To this end, she applied the reflective strategies proposed by Donald Schon (1983). First, the teacher should have the capacity to *reflect in action*, meaning that while she was implementing teaching

strategies and tactics, the researcher had to observe and analyze the process that was being carried out. Second, the teacher should have the ability to *reflect on* action, what meant that she needed to reflect on the process, which she carried out. Finally, considering the prior information and data collected, the researcher set up an action plan to overcome the weaknesses found. Taking into account the statements presented above, the researcher assumed both roles: that of a teacher and researcher; according to them she developed some specific functions. As a researcher, she established the objective of this study, she examined and guided the process revising all the academic information related to the starting point of this study, she created the instruments to collect data, she analyzed and classified the data obtained and finally she presented the results of this study. On the other hand, as a teacher, she applied different kind of oral activities to identify the problem of this study. Then, she created an action plan based on learners' needs. She provided learners with instructions to develop the planned activities. She revised the action plan and adjusted it to accommodate any possible difficulties she faced during the implementation stage. Finally, she made the corresponding feedback to the learners.

### **Instruments**

The data collection instruments in this study were selected and designed according to the aim of the research: determining the effect of self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation. The following instruments were used: journals, questionnaires, audio recordings and a post test.

*Journals* (See Appendix A): A journal is an instrument to reflect on the learning process and its development. In a journal both teachers and learners find the opportunity to express feelings, emotions and reactions personally (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). The researcher considered it as a useful instrument to allow learners to develop critical thinking and self-awareness of their own learning process. Once the students finished each planned lesson, they had an opportunity to analyze their learning process in terms of progress and improvement of pronunciation; perceptions and feelings became the tools to measure this aspect. They completed one journal per class.

Furthermore, this instrument was also used by the teacher. She used the journal to take notes about the most noticeable features of the class such as students' reaction and attitude to their progress on pronunciation improvement by the use of self-recordings. Those notes were important to get relevant data related to the students' perceptions about the use of self-recordings. The researcher completed one Teacher's journal per class.

*Questionnaires* (See Appendix B): It is an instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straight-forward to analyze (Wilson and McLean, 1994). The researcher implemented the same questionnaire before starting the process and at the end of this. Its main aim was to learn about the experiences learners had in terms of pronunciation improvement and their feedback regarding this research, especially their perceptions of the use of self-recordings as a means to improve pronunciation sub-skills.

*Audio recordings:* This instrument is defined by Cohen (2007) as a way to revisit the content of the class to analyze and identify the adequate and appropriate data to answer the research questions and accomplish the objectives of the study (p.445) . The author stated that taking notes is not enough to identify and collect useful data. Due to the fact that a lot of events occur at the same time in just one setting, the researcher does not have the ability to take clear and specific notes that are relevant to the research questions. Considering the nature and the usefulness of audio recordings, the researcher regarded the audio recordings as a necessary tool to collect data and to observe the learners' progress in improving pronunciation. For this reason, a recording was used by the researcher as a pre- test at the beginning of the process to identify learners' pronunciation. Then, during each single lesson recordings were implemented to measure the learners' improvement in terms of their pronunciation skills; they talked about topics related to their daily life and context. Also, audio recordings were used by the participants as a tool to reflect on their learning process. Finally, the researcher used a recording as a post- test to measure the progress of learners during all the process. All the audio- recordings were done by learners using the window's voice recording of the school's computers located at Dyned's classrooms.

### **Ethical considerations**

The nature of action research required that the participants be informed about the process and the methodology used to collect data (Cohen, 2007). Therefore, the following ethical considerations had to be taken into account.

- ❖ To maintain the anonymity of the participants, the researcher did not use their real names but pseudonyms and codes.
- ❖ The participants had to consent to their participation in the research project. Therefore, the researcher explained to them the objectives and the aims of this study and the strategies which were going to be used to collect data (interviews, pre-test and post- test, audio recording, etc.). Once students were informed about the details of the study, they were asked for their informed consent to participate (See Appendix C).
- ❖ The researcher was aware of the constraints which could appear during the research process such as organization of the school's schedule, the time and the inadequate functioning of some computers. In terms of school's schedule, the researcher made a list of the activities which could interrupt the research process. Then, considering it, she re-organized the schedule and asked for the collaboration of some teachers to take their class' time and applied the activities. Finally, in terms of the inadequate functioning of some technical equipment, the researcher made a list of computers which did not have problems and organized learners by turns in order to obtain from all of them the required quality of recordings.
- ❖ The researcher had the responsibility to manage the information collected confidentially. Consequently, she decided to keep all the data obtained on a personal USB key in password-protected folders.

Finally, the triangulation, reliability and validity processes were developed and applied during this research following the principles explained below:

- ❖ According to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008), “the validity process of a research project must focus on the degree to which a test or measuring instrument actually measures what it purports to measure or how well a test or a meaning instrument fulfills its function” (p.2278). In fact, the researcher should employ appropriate methodology and instruments to give the possible answers to the research’s questions. To this end, all the instruments applied were focused on obtaining data related to the impact of pronunciation skills by the use of self-recordings.
- ❖ Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) stated that the reliability process is one of the most desirable technical merits in any educational research though its meaning differs in quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research assures the possibility of replication. Oluwatayo (2012) stated that a certain limit of experimental error or random error could be faced; if the same methods are used with the same sample, then the results should be the same” (p.395). In terms of reliability, this study analyzed a fact which affected the English language learning process of eighth graders at a private institution; it was their lack of pronunciation awareness. Hence, the applied instruments were created taking into account the objectives of the project; they showed the same results during their different applications. For instance, the questionnaires were applied at the end of each lesson and the researcher found the same results in terms of learners’ perceptions about the self-recordings.
- ❖ Triangulation is conceived by Cohen and Morrison (2007) as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p.233). Hence, the purpose of the triangulation

process in this research project was to increase the credibility and validity of the results. To develop the triangulation process during this study, the researcher compared the results obtained with the applied instruments: questionnaires, audio recordings, journals and post tests. During this comparison process, she found recurrent data which consistently supported and gave the answer to her research question.

- ❖ During a research project a constant observation of the learners' performance is required. Therefore, the researcher decided to use teacher's reflective journal to take notes about the learners' performance and attitude during the lessons.

To conclude, the information presented above is related to the research design, including participants, the role of the researcher and ethical considerations. The next section provides details pertaining the instructional design of the pedagogical intervention.



## **Chapter IV. Instructional design**

The researcher designed the pedagogical intervention based on the theoretical framework and the research design. This instructional design was framed into the *Critical Listening approach* proposed by Fraser in 2006. It aims at the promotion of learners' awareness of the English language pronunciation and its improvement through the use of recordings. Following this approach, the researcher set up the goals for this pedagogical intervention. The researcher created and implemented in her class a method which included the use of self-recordings.

### **Instructional goals**

The following were the instructional goals targeted during the study:

- ❖ To foster autonomy among teenager EFL learners to improve speaking skills through self-recordings.
- ❖ To foster critical and analytic attitudes between learners to reflect on their own learning process.
- ❖ To promote learner's awareness of the English language pronunciation.

### **Instructional Method**

This instructional design applied the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation) process proposed by Dick and Carey (2004). This method consists of five progressive steps in which there is a formative evaluation of the learning process. First, the researcher has to analyze the needs of the learners who are going to be the participants of the action research study. Second, it is necessary to develop learning

strategies and objectives, to select an instructional approach. Third, considering learner's needs, the researcher should create materials which are going to be applied during the research time. Fourth, the researcher should reflect on the application of instructional materials. Finally, it is necessary to evaluate the materials created in terms of the achievement of the goals established for the study.

The researcher selected this process because she considered it was the appropriate one due to the fact that it allowed her to establish an action plan and evaluate each part of the process consciously. The ADDIE model established the sequence of the activities the researcher followed in terms of the reflection and analysis of the tasks created, providing the opportunity of refining and improving those activities according to the instructional goals. Also, it was a way to involve the learners as the main participants of the project.

As mentioned above, the Critical Listening approach was selected as the strategy for teaching pronunciation because it allowed learners to be aware of their pronunciation and their language learning process. It was proposed by Fraser in 2006 and consisted of the externalization of the speech followed by analysis and feedback. It was focused on the observation and analysis of real verbal interactions. Also, it was a way to establish the difference between what people think they are saying and what they actually produce and how it is perceived by others (Fraser, 2006).

According to Fraser, the role of the teacher is essential in guiding learners in the use of recordings. Accordingly, he/she should help the learner to understand how listeners use speaker cues to interpret the message being communicated and the factors that lead to successful as well as unsuccessful exchanges. The author states, that this method is based on

the assumption that pronunciation is a cognitive skill which involves both ‘knowing’ things (subconsciously) about language, and being able to do things physically with the body (Fraser, 2006).

The researcher considered this approach as the most appropriate one to apply during this action research project because its nature of analyzing and reflecting on pronunciation features allowed learners to acquire and develop awareness of their own learning process, especially in terms of pronunciation skills. The pronunciation workshops created following this model consisted of 10 sessions; 2 hours each (See Appendix D). The intervention process was divided into the following three stages:

- ❖ First, the participants were introduced to the topic of the action research project and the process that was going to be carried out.
- ❖ Second, they were trained on the use of self-recordings, phonetics instructions and the process they were supposed to follow to analyze them in terms of the improvement of pronunciation skills. They prepared their own speech following the teacher’s instructions. Then, they received teacher’s feedback to improve their speeches in order to correct them. In this sense, teacher used recordings with the correct pronunciation of the phonemes in order to model this. Finally, they recorded themselves talking about the topics given by the teacher and considering the instructions received about the phonetic production they should do.
- ❖ Third, the researcher listened to the recordings to identify if the students had advanced in terms of the improvement of their English pronunciation. Feedback was provided based on the students’ recordings. Students were asked to also listen to

their own recordings and identify their own pronunciation weaknesses as well as take notes on their observations. After that, they were asked to consider teacher's feedback and their analysis to develop the next tasks of the project. Finally, they were supposed to complete the learner's journal in which they reflected on their own learning process in terms of their pronunciation skills.

### **Instructional materials**

Once the instructional goals were established, it was necessary to create the instructional materials for the students. At the same time the learners implemented the learner's journal to reflect on their own learning process. It was a strategy which allowed them to develop and acquire awareness on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their language learning process. They analyzed their progress in terms of pronunciation skills' improvement (See Appendix A).

### **Main Aims:**

Taking into account the objective of this study related to the effect of self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation skills, the researcher established specific aims to each lesson in which she could identify the learners' progress. Three examples of these aims are presented below:

By the end of the lesson students will be able to pronounce the English phoneme /s/ correctly in the initial position in words.

The students will recognize the pronunciation of the phoneme /s/. (Subsidiary Aim)

- The students will use self-recordings to practice the pronunciation of the phoneme /s/. (Subsidiary Aim)

Each lesson was focused on a different phoneme; learners were supposed to practice the correct pronunciation of those phonemes through the use of self-recordings. The following chapter presents and describes the obtained results and their corresponding analysis.

## **Chapter V. Data analysis and findings**

In this chapter the researcher presents the analysis and the interpretation of the data gathered from the audio recordings, the teacher's journal and the learners' journal. Subsequently, the data collection and analysis process is summarized. The chapter concludes with the list of categories that emerged from the collected data illustrating this information with some samples taken from the instruments applied in the study.

As already mentioned in the first chapter, this research focused on the effect of self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation skills in twenty one eighth graders of a private institution. This study examined the possible answers to the following research question:

- What is the effect of self-recordings on students' pronunciation?

By answering the research question the researcher intended to accomplish the following objective:

- To determine the effect of self-recordings on the improvement of pronunciation.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Grounded's theory method was applied in this research study. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), in *Grounded theory* the researcher interprets the information obtained from the research instruments. Then considering the data, he should label and categorize the concepts identified. The use of codes is necessary to organize the data related to the research questions. Finally, the researcher analyzes the codes obtained. A grounded process provides the opportunity to the researcher to make decisions on the spot. In the case of this study, the

researcher was in a continuous process of reflection and revision. For this reason, the strategies presented by the grounded theory to analyze the data allowed her to be selective and reflective of the main information to answer the research question.

The data collection process was carried out during two months. The instruments used were: audio recordings, learners' and teacher's journals. First, the audio recordings were used to identify the learners' progress in terms of pronunciation skills. Also, this instrument was administered to collect data of learners' perceptions of the use of self-recordings. Second, the learners' journal was used to provide learners' with opportunities to reflect on their own learning process and the researcher with information about their perceptions of the use of self-recordings to improve their pronunciation skills. Finally, the teacher's journal was used by the researcher to take reflective notes of the learners' attitudes and reactions when they recorded their speech. These two final instruments were applied at the end of each lesson in order to encourage deep reflection.

Once all the data were collected, the researcher organized them in different folders: learners' journal folder, teacher's journal folder and transcriptions' folder. As the focus of the project was pronunciation, she only transcribed the words which began with specific sounds such as /θ/ /s/ /w/ as those phonemes were the ones which presented more difficulties to the learners and thus were the focus of the study. In some other cases, she considered learners' pronunciation of vowels. As a result, when she started the analysis process, it was easy for her to compare the instruments and establish the possible categories.

Regarding learners' responses in the instruments applied, the research question and the literature review, the researcher established one main unit of analysis to discriminate the data collected. In terms of the process, learners developed with the use of self-recordings, she established a core category called *Improvement in pronunciation skills*. This category had three subcategories which were labeled:

- a. *Enhancement of motivation*
- b. *Awareness enabling improvement in pronunciation*
- c. *Learning strategies*

The researcher used open, axial and selective coding processes to manage the data obtained. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), the open coding process requires the researcher to observe, associate, theorize, categorize and name the data. Once the researcher has done it, he/she should identify the concepts and specific details that emerge. In axial coding, the researcher should determine connections between the categories established before. Finally, the selective coding process refers to the procedure of identifying and selecting the core category of the research. Once the core category is selected by the researcher, she/he is in charge of relating it to the other categories and validating this information through samples taken from the applied instruments.

The technique that the researcher used to code data was number coding. While she read the data, she assigned the number (1) to the first subcategory of analysis, which referred to the learner's motivation to improve their pronunciation. For the second subcategory, she used the number (2) to identify the data related to the students' level of awareness to



improve their pronunciation skills. Finally, the information related to the strategies that a learner used with self-recordings was identified with the number (3).

**Core category and subcategories**

Once she analyzed the data, the researcher decided to establish one core category which could answer the research question and three sub categories to support it, as it is presented in Table 1 below.

Research question	Core Category	Sub- category
What is the effect of self- recordings on students' pronunciation?	Improvement in pronunciation skills	Enhancement of motivation
		Awareness enabling improvement in pronunciation
		Learning strategies

**Table 1. Core category and subcategories.**

The core category, *Improvement in pronunciation skills* related to the progress learners showed in their pronunciation skills. The first subcategory was called *Enhancement of motivation*. This category related to the level of motivation learners experienced that impacted the improvement of their pronunciation skills. This second sub-category was called *Awareness enabling improvement in pronunciation*, which referred to the level of awareness that the students experienced in terms of observing their mistakes. Thirdly, the researcher created a sub-category called *Learning strategies*, which referred to the methods and tactics

applied by the learners to analyze their own recordings. A more in-depth explanation of the core category and each of its subcategories are presented below with each one of them illustrated with examples taken from the different data collection instruments.

### **Improvement in pronunciation skills**

This core category was called *Improvement in pronunciation skills* because after the data analysis, the researcher observed that the majority of the learners of this group improved their pronunciation skills of the specific phonemes /θ/ /s/ /w/. In this section, the researcher presents some samples taken from the audio recordings and learners' journals in which the students showed the progress they had. Besides, the sub-categories mentioned above are presented in order to explain the reasons that made the improvement of pronunciation skills possible.

### **Enhancement of motivation**

There was a recurrent theme in the collected data which referred to the motivation that learners showed to improve their pronunciation skills. As a result, the researcher decided to create this sub-category to show how learners felt motivated during the implementation of the research process to overcome their pronunciation difficulties. In fact, the researcher noticed that participants presented different reactions and attitudes about the use of self-recordings. In most of the cases, learners considered self-recordings as a new way to learn; they were different from the traditional strategies employed by the teachers during their English class to practice pronunciation. For instance, S13 in her learner's journal one responses showed that she felt motivated to use recordings for the reasons presented below:

**S13:** It is a different activity and good to use the microphone to improve the pronunciation (Sic).

Also, self-recordings were conceived by the learners as useful tools which helped them to practice some special pronunciation features, which are not considered during the implementation of a traditional method. For instance, S15 response to the question *Did you feel motivated to use self-recordings?* demonstrated that she felt motivated to use self-recordings even though she considered her voice different and strange:

**S15:** Yes, because I listen my voice different but I like so much the exercise (Sic).

In some other cases learners' responses showed that self-recordings allowed them to feel comfortable to speak naturally. They were able to overcome some affective barriers and felt confident to speak. As a result, motivation was a factor which helped students overcome the barrier normally preventing them from expressing their ideas. Also, learners conceived self-recordings as useful tools which allowed them to improve their oral skills in general. For instance S7, S8 and S12 stated the following reasons to feel motivated when using self-recordings:

**S7:** Yes, because, I feel relax with the pronuntation and recordings with my topic the future (Sic)

**S8:** Yes, because if we lose our fear and we can speak more clearly (Sic)

**S12:** Yes, because I take confidence to speak with another people (Sic)

Moreover, students expressed that self-recordings were useful tools to apply on their daily life and future. Consequently, the researcher can establish a direct relation among the learner's level of motivation and the implications that the use of self-recordings have on the learner's practice and communication. Students felt motivated to use self-recordings to

improve their pronunciation skills because they recognized the importance of oral skills to interact with different people. Also, self-recordings allowed them to acquire a high level of fluency which can be used in the future to get successful results. For instance S7, S15 and S19 seemed to be able to recognize the importance of improving their pronunciation skills to have a successful interaction and prospects for the future:

**S7:** Yes, because for my daily life and my future (Sic)

**S12:** Yes, because the voice opens a lot of doors in the future and can help me (Sic)

**S19:** I like it because I can listen how I listen on the telephone or maybe talking with my friends.

Summarizing the data presented above, self-recordings were conceived by the eighth graders of a private institution, as tools which were helpful in improving their oral skills. In fact, self-recordings allowed them to feel confident to speak naturally and fluently, which normally presented a high difficulty for them when they needed to talk in front of a group. Finally, the learners' responses showed a direct relation between their motivation to use self-recordings and their effect in their future and in their learning practice. In addition, the researcher observed that some of them considered the self-recordings as a fun strategy to improve their pronunciation skills. During the classes, she noticed that they felt motivated to use self-recordings and they genuinely enjoyed the practice. The use of self-recordings was new and useful for them. Besides, self-recordings allowed them to reflect on real situations in which they should speak with correct pronunciation.

### **Awareness enabling improvement in pronunciation**

The second sub-category stated that self-recordings allowed learners to improve their pronunciation skills due to main two reasons: a) The students acquired the ability to recognize and correct their own pronunciation mistakes; b) they acquired the ability to reflect on their progress. The observed learners, indeed, became aware of English pronunciation features when recording their voices. They talked about different aspects of their daily life and contexts. In this case, participants wrote about their hobbies and likes. For instance, S1, S4 and S21 demonstrated they improved their pronunciation of the phonemes /s/, /w/, and /θ/:

#### **S1:My favorite hobbies**

Since I was a little girl, I started to have some hobbies like practicing some /spɔ:ts/ such as basketball, volleyball, football, tennis etc. Also, I like listening to music because I love the letters of the songs. I dance, I sing and I play the guitar and the bass. I write some songs besides I chat /wið/ my friends, I go to the shopping center, I /wɒtʃ/ some movies and last but not less important. The /θɪŋz/that I love: travel to different places and ride horse.

**S4:**When I grow up I want to be a mom, I will have 2 daughters, their names will be Silvia & Paulina, My dream is to be a professional person, working by myself because I don't need anyone to 'survive'. I want to /laɪv/ in Manchester, Because I want that my daughters have a appropriate learning, I want that Paulina & Silvia have a British accent, but I will /spi:k// 'spæntɪʃ/to them to But after getting pregnant, I want to travel around the world with my husband. I want to be a chef, I love cooking since I was a little girl, I made the breakfast to all my family, I'm going to be a chef, I'm going to be the best chef ever. (Sic)

#### **S21:MY HOBBIES**

My favorite hobbies are listening the music, /'wɒtʃɪŋ/ TV , play in the computer , go out with my friends , play /wið/ my dog in the park , spend time /wið/ my family . I /θɪŋk/ that all that /θɪŋz/ are important because I can learn about more /θɪŋz/ about family and technology and I can use the

computer and the TV to do homework , because sometimes the teachers tell us that /wi:/ have to learn about /θɪŋz/ that /wi:/ needed for a homework , so my family can help me to because are some /θɪŋz/ that I can't found in the TV or the computer so I can ask to my cousins or to my uncle or my mom or dad so is more easy found information about /θɪŋz/ that /wi:/ have to use .

As demonstrated in the samples presented above, the researcher observed that learners pronounced the phonemes /s/, /w/, and /θ/ correctly at the beginning of the words *sports*, *speak*, *Spanish*, *with*, *watch*, *watching*, *we*, *think* and *things*. For this reason, when analyzing each recording, it was necessary to transcribe the pronunciation of the phonemes made by the learners. They pronounced the word *sports* being aware of the sound produced by the mouth when the air goes out which represents a fricative phoneme. In terms of the labiovelar approximant phoneme /w/, learners recognized the semi vocalic counterpart of the close rounded vowel /u/, which is the sound of this phoneme in the English language. Regarding the pronunciation of the voiceless dental non-sibilant fricative, the students pronounced it correctly; more precisely, they produced this phoneme by contracting air flow by a slim channel at the articulation's place (Wells, 1982). It was necessary to have some phonetic lessons in which with the guidance of the teacher, learners practiced the pronunciation of the phonemes mentioned above. The researcher stated that it was a useful strategy to make learners being aware of the phonetic production in some specific sounds and words.

In their responses, the students affirmed to be aware of an improvement of their pronunciation skills resulting from the self-recordings which allowed them to recognize their mistakes:

**S2:** I can listen my mistakes and correct them.

**S3:** You can listen your mistakes and improve in that (Sic).

**S4:** I improve my pronunciation learning and practicing my pronunciation and knowing my mistakes (Sic).

**S5:** When I use self- recording I listen my voice and I listen if my pronunciation is good or bad.

As it was evidenced in the extracts presented above, learners expressed that when they recorded their voice, they had the opportunity to recognize their own mistakes. To identify these aspects, learners considered the models presented by the teacher which consisted of audios with the correct pronunciation of the phonemes in which learners faced difficulties to produce. In fact, when a learner is able to identify his weaknesses and strengths, he is able to reflect on their own learning.

Besides, the researcher affirmed in her final teacher's journal that some students improved their pronunciation skills because when they were recording their voices, they remembered the feedback provided by the teacher and corrected their pronunciation mistakes themselves:

#### *Teacher's journal*

Some of the learners have become aware of the position of the articulator system to produce sounds like /θ/ and /w/. This is the case of student 21 who faced difficulties to produce these sounds at the beginning of the process. However, my feedback and the modeling provided at the end of each lesson allowed her to be aware of the sounds of the phonemes /θ/ and /w/; when she was recording her voice she recognized her mistakes and she repeated the recording.

Finally, learners acquired awareness to reflect not only on their pronunciation skills, but also on the progress they had during this process. For instance, in the responses presented below learners stated the following reasons:

**S5:** Yes, because in some words I don't pronounce good but now I pronounce good this words (Sic)

**S7:** Yes, because I advance in the pronunciation (Sic)

**S10:** Yes, I improve my pronunciation skills. (Sic)

**S15:** Yes, because I know that I improve my pronunciation and that is good (Sic).

**S13:** Yes, because I improve the pronunciation (Sic)

**S21:** Yes, because my pronunciation is better

Taking into account the examples presented above and other similar responses, the researcher concluded that learners acquired the ability to evaluate their process in terms of progress and improvement. Thus, learners saw their progress during this procedure; they now were able to judge their own learning using the feedback acquired from the teacher and their peers. Consequently, the researcher concluded that learners became autonomous and responsible for their own learning process, which prompts improvement of pronunciation through the metacognitive abilities obtained by the learners.

Finally, learners stated that self-recordings allowed them to know the pronunciation of words which are not commonly used. When they were preparing their speeches they used some new words. Not only did they use these new words, but they also learnt how to pronounce these specific words.

### **Learning strategies**

Considering the information presented above about the metacognitive skills learners obtained, the researcher could observe a direct relation between these abilities and the sub-category called *Learning strategies* which refers to the strategies that learners used when



recording their voices. Once they reflected on their learning process, learners started to apply different tactics to monitor their learning process.

The researcher noticed that when learners were recording their voice they employed five different strategies to use self-recordings as a means to improve their pronunciation skills. The first one was related to the process of recording their voice and then listening to it in order to identify mistakes. Once they had done it, they listened to the model presented by the teacher and compared their pronunciation with it. They also took notes of the possible mistakes they made. After that, when they compared their own pronunciation with the one of the model, they recorded their voice again remembering the pronunciation of the specific words which they could not pronounce properly in the first place. This action demonstrated that these learners were aware of their difficulties in terms of pronunciation skills. For this reason, they decided to employ some strategies such as repetition and comparison, which allowed them to identify the specific phonemes which represented more difficulties for them. Also, the comparison process allowed them to recognize the English pronunciation patterns in order to have a clear idea of how to produce each sound. For instance, S4 and S19 in their learner's journal responses expressed that self-recordings were good tools to recognize their pronunciation mistakes:

**S4:** When I record my voice I listen them again to identify my mistakes (Sic).

**S19:** When I listen me on the computer, I can recognize my mistakes and correct them in order to improve my pronunciation skills (Sic).

Besides, these learners commented that the repetition and comparison were possible with the implementation of self-recordings to improve their pronunciation skills:

**S4:** I listen the teacher. I practice and know what I am saying wrong, I can compare my pronunciation with the voice of the program and repeat my recording (Sic).

**S19:** When we use self- recordings, we can repeat all what we say and then we can listen in order to compare our voice and pronunciation with the model presented by the the teacher (Sic).

As it is evidenced in the samples presented above, learners employed different strategies to make self-recordings a successful tool to improve their pronunciation skills. Although, the researcher did not establish specific strategies to use with self-recordings, learners were able to organize their own tasks and apply their own strategies to work with the recordings. It demonstrated that they were able to plan their learning to meet their own learning needs.

In addition, the researcher identified a recurrent strategy in learners' responses and her observations: learners asked for teacher's feedback. For instance, the following examples showed that S5 and S11 considered this strategy as a relevant and helpful one for their learning process:

**S5:** When I use self- recordings I listen my voice and I listen if my pronunciation is good or bad underlying my errors. Then I record my voice again and ask for feedback (Sic).

**S11:** I asked to Mis Jessica when I have a question about my recordings (Sic).

As it is demonstrated in the responses presented above, learners used different strategies to develop a conscious process with the implementation of self-recordings to improve their pronunciation skills. For this reason, they took notes about the mistakes they had and then they asked for teacher's feedback. This demonstrated their interest and motivation to improve their pronunciation. Also, they were able to create their own

strategies to analyze their progress in terms of pronunciation, which was an evidence of some degree of autonomy and ability to plan their learning.

Furthermore, the researcher described some of the perceptions about the strategies employed by the learners to use self-recordings to improve their speaking skills:

*Teacher's Journal 2:*

- They prepared their speeches according to my instructions.
- They started to develop new strategies to reflect on their own recordings: repetition, comparison of their pronunciation with the correct one, they recorded their voices again, when they consider they have not pronounced correctly.
- They asked for continuous feedback when they did not know the correct pronunciation of a word.

The data presented above allowed the researcher to specify the different strategies learners use to develop a successful implementation of self-recordings to improve their pronunciation. It demonstrated that learners were able to plan when they had to fulfill a requirement. Also, it showed to the researcher that they were aware of the responsibility they had in their own learning process. They assumed the role of managing their own process with the guidance of the teacher, which in terms of autonomy represents one of the key characteristics of an autonomous learner.

During the lessons the researcher noticed that learners had the ability to monitor their own learning process; they were aware of their needs in terms of pronunciation skills and they reflected on their own learning. Also, when they analyzed their recordings they were aware of their mistakes and immediately corrected them. That resulted in a substantial

progress in their pronunciation skills because now the students knew how to pronounce some words that in the past were problematic for them.

Finally, the implementation of self-recordings was new for them because they had not been trained in the use of this method. Overall, the strategies applied by the learners were a significant step toward the learner's improvement of pronunciation skills and the acquisition of autonomy.

## **Chapter VI: Conclusions, Pedagogical implications, Limitations and Further research**

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings of this research study and the implications it had in the community. The main purpose of this research study was to investigate the effect of self-recording on the improvement of learners' pronunciation skills. Generally, EFL learners consider speaking to be the most complex language skill to acquire. One of the reasons for that perception is the fact that pronunciation of the English language is totally different from their L1. In fact, the participants of this project felt nervous to talk in English, which affected their pronunciation.

Considering the prior thoughts and the research question, *what is the effect of self-recordings on students' pronunciation?*, the researcher observed the following:

- Learners acquired the ability to monitor their own learning processes; the use of self-recordings allowed them to recognize their mistakes on pronunciation. When they recorded their voices, they developed several strategies such as comparison, asking for feedback, analysis of their own recordings and practicing before they recorded their voices. In fact, learners were focused on developing the tasks consciously; they acquired the ability to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of pronunciation skills.
- Some of the learners felt motivated to use self-recordings to improve their pronunciation skills because this tool made them reflect on their own learning process and the improvement of pronunciation. It was an effective strategy to prompt learners' awareness of their knowledge of pronunciation and how they can apply it.

- Learners' perceptions about the self-recordings varied. Those learners who felt motivated affirmed that self-recordings were a useful tool to improve their pronunciation skills. It was conceived as a new and innovative tool to learn and to practice English pronunciation. Also, learners considered that self-recordings were useful for reflection on their pronunciation strengths and weaknesses.
- The majority of the learners improved their pronunciation skills. Some of them had difficulties to pronounce the phonemes /s/, /w/, and /θ/ at the beginning of the process; they pronounced these phonemes as they do in their L1. The use of self-recordings and the phonetics instruction given by the teacher allowed them to practice pronunciation and be aware of the correct way to pronounce these sounds. They became aware of the sound produced by the mouth when the air goes out which represents a fricative phoneme. In terms of the labiovelar approximant phoneme /w/, most of them recognized the semi vocalic counterpart of the close rounded vowel /u/, which is the sound of this phoneme in English language. Regarding the pronunciation of the voiceless dental non-sibilant fricative, the students pronounced it correctly.
- Learners applied different strategies to develop a successful implementation of self-recordings to improve their English pronunciation. It demonstrated that learners were able to set up specific action plans when they had to fulfill a requirement. Also, it showed to the researcher that they were aware of the responsibility they had in their own learning process; they assumed the role of managing their own process

with the guidance of the teacher, which is one of the key characteristics of being an autonomous learner.

### **Pedagogical implications**

As pronunciation skills are viewed by the learners as complex and challenging, they are not considered by them as favorite ones to focus on. Learners felt scared when they talked, when they did not know the pronunciation of specific phonemes of foreign languages. Also, during the English learning processes carried out at the private institution where this research took place, teachers should provide learners with feedback and guidance about the development of speaking skills. In some other cases, it would be useful the implementation of technological tools to enable more effective modeling of sounds and pronunciation practice.

Taking into account the reasons presented above, teachers at this private institution, especially English ones need to reflect on the strategies and methodology applied during their classes. It is necessary to make learners aware of the oral features of the English language, which allow them to have an efficient and successful communication with others. In fact, some activities such as modeling the correct pronunciation of English phonemes through tongue twisters, recordings and audios could be applied by the teachers considering that learners expect a variety of actions, which help them to improve their pronunciation skills. As languages represent a tool to communicate ideas and thoughts, the pronunciation becomes a relevant aspect during a communicative situation. In fact, there is a need of practicing this in real-life contexts.

## **Limitations**

The researcher felt that this project was beneficial, informing and motivating to improve her teaching practice. It was a tool which she used to reflect on one of the difficulties that her learners faced. The focus of this study was the promotion of consciousness and awareness when practicing oral skills, aspect which will allow learners to achieve effective communication and exchange of ideas.

In terms of the research process, the researcher faced some constraints such as the fact that not all the members of the school supported the process. The researcher planned her classes with specific times, however in some cases it was not possible to carry out the complete lesson, which forced her to re-organize the schedule in order to achieve the goals and activities planned for the study. In fact, the researcher decided to talk to the school administrators in order to have extra time outside of the regular class hour. Finally, the coordinators and the principal approved to provide her with a specific time in the schedule.

Another limitation which the researcher faced was that not all the computers and sets of headphones and microphones were working well. At the beginning of the study, the technician checked all the technological tools she was going to use, but during the classes learners damaged some of them. Hence, when she needed to use the microphones to record learners' voices, she had to organize and divide learners to accommodate the malfunctioning computers, which caused some increase in student motivation. For this reason, some of the learners decided to work with their laptops, which helped the researcher to continue working with the self-recordings during the classes.

Another limitation that the researcher faced was related to the bias she experienced. It was a difficult process to establish the objectives of the study due to the fact that the topic



selected was huge and she found a lot of difficulties to reduce its scope. Also, it was very difficult to decide and create the appropriate instruments to collect the data. Although each one of them had a specific function to collect data, the researcher felt that all of them were similar. Regarding the data analysis, the researcher felt that it was the most difficult part of the research process. She had to analyze the data more than once and organized it considering the recurrent ideas. It was a long process which required deep reflection and analysis in order to organize the data properly. All of the aspects mentioned above were solved by the researcher and the guidance of her thesis director who all the time was solving the researchers' doubts.

Besides the aspects mentioned above, the researcher faced another difficulty which was related to the development of the learner's journals. As it was mentioned before in the description of the participants, their English language level is A2 according to the CEFR. In this sense, they had troubles to clearly present their ideas about the use of self-recordings and the effect of them in their language learning process. To work with this difficulty the researcher guided the writing process of the participants through samples and explanation of written language.

### **Further research**

Finally, regarding further research it is important to motivate learners to reflect on their own learning processes. Therefore, metacognition is an interesting construct to work with considering that it is the basis of the ability to be autonomous. Moreover, it would be beneficial to investigate the impact that self-recordings have on the acquisition of new vocabulary and language input.

Taking into account all the prior information presented, it was demonstrated that self-recordings were a useful tool not only to improve pronunciation skills but also to increase learners' motivation to apply their knowledge in authentic language learning contexts. In fact, they recognized the importance of having excellent pronunciation skills to ensure an effective communication process. Also, this study revealed that during a teaching practice it is necessary to assume roles as a researcher and as a teacher; it is the way of reflecting on own processes and to identify and recognize facts that could affect the learning process of the learners. Hence, during this study the researcher had the opportunity to present and apply a different method from the traditional ones to improve learners' pronunciation skills. It was the use of self-recordings. This experience allowed the researcher to reflect on the importance of applying new and innovative teaching methodologies in the language classroom.

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## Appendix A

### Learner's reflective journal

This exercise will help you to reflect on your own learning process, especially the one carried out during this lesson. Please, answer the following questions considering your advancement during this lesson. Did you improve your pronunciation skills? Yes- No why?, Are the self-recordings a good instrument to improve your pronunciation skills? Yes- No why? Did you feel motivated to use self-recordings? Yes- No Why?

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Class no.:**

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**Teacher's reflective journal**

**Date:**

**Class no.:**

**Positive aspects:**

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**Negative aspects:**

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**Possible solutions and plans:**

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## Appendix B

### QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey was created to understand the experiences you have with the English pronunciation development.

**Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you have problems with English pronunciation? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_ Why? Explain your answer.

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2. Have you been trained in English pronunciation before this project? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_ How?

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3. During your English classes, has your teacher guided you to improve your English pronunciation? Yes \_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_ How?



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4. Do you consider recordings useful tools to improve your English pronunciation?

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Why?

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5. How do you feel when you use self-recordings?

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## Appendix C

### Consent letters

Tenjo (Cundinamarca), 20 de marzo de 2012

Señor

Pedro Luis Espinosa Beltrán

Rector

Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico

Ciudad

Respetado Señor:

Actualmente me encuentro cursando tercer semestre de maestría en didáctica del inglés con énfasis en aprendizaje autónomo, la cual es dirigida a docentes de inglés en desarrollo. Por tal razón y como requisito de la asignatura conocida como *Action Research*, debo desarrollar e implementar un proyecto de investigación, el cual busca contribuir y enriquecer el proceso de aprendizaje de la segunda lengua en los estudiantes de grado octavo del Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico y así mismo reorientar las prácticas docentes correspondientes a la lengua extranjera.

Así pues, el proyecto que he venido adelantando es conocido como “Improving English pronunciation skills through self-recordings”, el cual tiene como objetivo el mejoramiento

de habilidades orales en inglés; específicamente la pronunciación de los estudiantes de octavo grado del Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico.

Por lo anterior, comedidamente solicito su consentimiento y colaboración para realizar mi propuesta de investigación, que se llevará a cabo durante el año en curso. Esto implica recolectar y analizar los resultados, por lo cual debo ser autorizada para aplicar encuestas, entrevistas. Así mismo, para realizar audio y video filmaciones de algunas clases, con el fin de conocer y analizar el proceso de las habilidades orales en lengua inglesa, especialmente la conocida como pronunciación.

Igualmente, a los participantes se les garantizará el uso de nombres ficticios para mantener su identidad en el anonimato, así como estricta confidencialidad con la información que se recolecte. El proyecto no tendrá incidencia alguna en las evaluaciones y notas parciales y/o finales del curso.

Agradezco de antemano su valioso aporte para llevar a buen término mi investigación.

Atentamente,

Jessica Milena Mancera Arévalo

Docente de Inglés

Acepto \_\_\_\_\_

C.C No. \_\_\_\_\_

Tenjo (Cundinamarca). 20 de marzo 2011

Señores

Padres de familia grado octavo A

Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico

Ciudad

Respetados Señores:

Actualmente me encuentro cursando tercer semestre de maestría en didáctica del inglés con énfasis en aprendizaje autónomo, la cual es dirigida a docentes de inglés. Por tal razón y como requisito de la asignatura conocida como *Action Research*, debo desarrollar e implementar un proyecto de investigación, el cual busca contribuir y enriquecer el proceso de aprendizaje de la segunda lengua en los estudiantes de grado octavo del Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico y así mismo reorientar las prácticas docentes correspondientes a la lengua extranjera.

Así pues, el proyecto que he venido adelantando es conocido como “Improving English pronunciation skills through self-recordings”, el cual tiene como objetivo el mejoramiento de habilidades orales en inglés; específicamente la pronunciación de los estudiantes de grado octavo del Gimnasio Campestre Reino Británico.

Por lo anterior, comedidamente solicito su consentimiento y colaboración para realizar mi propuesta de investigación, que se llevará a cabo durante el segundo semestre del año en curso. Esto implica recolectar y analizar los resultados, por lo cual debo ser autorizada para

aplicar encuestas a sus hijos. Así mismo, para realizar audio y video filmaciones de algunas clases, con el fin de conocer y analizar el proceso de las habilidades orales en lengua inglesa, especialmente la conocida como pronunciación.

Igualmente, a los participantes se les garantizará el uso de nombres ficticios para mantener su identidad en el anonimato, así como estricta confidencialidad con la información que se recolecte. El proyecto no tendrá incidencia alguna en las evaluaciones y notas parciales y/o finales del curso.

Agradezco de antemano su valioso aporte para llevar a buen término mi investigación.

Atentamente,

Jessica Milena Mancera Arévalo

Docente de Inglés

Acepto \_\_\_\_\_

C.C No. \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**

**Implementation time table**

<p><b>First Stage</b></p> <p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b>Second stage</b></p> <p><b>Training and Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Third Stage</b></p> <p><b>Analysis and Feedback</b></p>
<p>February 7<sup>th</sup> – February 10<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Beginning lesson: Breaking the ice</p> <p>The students will be focused on the topic, role game of our personal life.</p> <p>Instrument: Pre- test</p>	<p>March 5<sup>th</sup>- March 9<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Presentation of self- recordings samples.</p>	<p>April 2<sup>nd</sup>- April 6<sup>th</sup></p> <p>What do you want to be?</p> <p>The students will record their voices during two minutes talking about their dreams and plans for the future.</p> <p>Instrument: Audio recordings</p>
<p>February 13<sup>th</sup> – February 17<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Presentation of the project:</p> <p>The students will be informed about the project itself. They need to reflect on their experiences of language learning.</p> <p>Instrument: Questionnaire</p>	<p>March 12<sup>th</sup>- March 16<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Talking about my personal life:</p> <p>The students will present their personal information in audio recording of two minutes.</p>	<p>April 9<sup>th</sup>- April 13<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Students will analyze their recordings and the language learning process. They will listen and analyze their own samples and take notes in the learner’s journal.</p> <p>Instrument: Learner’s journal.</p>

	Instrument: Audio recordings	
<p>February 20<sup>th</sup> - February 24<sup>th</sup></p> <p>What is a self- recording? Explanation and presentation of some samples of self- recordings in the language learning process.</p> <p>Instrument: Audio recording</p>	<p>March 19<sup>th</sup>- March 23<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Analysis and evaluation of the personal information recordings. The class will listen the audio recording presented by the teacher in terms of pronunciation mistakes.</p>	<p>April 16<sup>th</sup>- April 20<sup>th</sup></p> <p>What are my hobbies?</p> <p>The students will record their voices during two minutes talking about their hobbies and leisure time activities.</p> <p>Instrument: Audio recordings</p>
<p>February 27<sup>th</sup>- March 2<sup>nd</sup></p> <p>Do you like self – recordings?</p> <p>Debate about the use of self- recordings in the classes and in different contexts from the school one.</p> <p>Instrument: Audio Recording</p>	<p>March 26<sup>th</sup>- March 30</p> <p>How to analyze my recording?</p> <p>Teacher will introduce students through the process itself of analyzing their recordings and the language learning process. They will listen and analyze their own samples and take notes on</p>	<p>April 23<sup>th</sup> - April 27<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Students will analyze their recordings and the language learning process. They will listen and analyze their own samples and take notes in the learner’s journal.</p> <p>Instrument: Learner’s journal.</p>

	the learner's journal. Instrument:       Learner's journal.	
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**Appendix E**

**LESSON PLAN**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Procedure</b>  <b>Teacher and student activity</b>	<b>Time and interaction</b>
Pre-test	To recognize the pronunciation of the phoneme /s/ at the beginning of the words.	The teacher asks students to read the words she asks show them.	5 minutes
Warming up	To introduce the topic related to the English phoneme pronunciation.	The teacher locates some posters with words that begin with the phoneme /s/. Learners should read them doing as they normally do. Then, the teacher uses a recording to show them the proper pronunciation. They should compare what they said with the way in which it needs to be pronounced.	10 minutes.
Pre-recording	To identify the proper	The teacher gives learners some jumbled tongue twisters. Learners should work in	20 minutes

	<p>pronunciation of the phoneme /s/.</p> <p>To practice the correct pronunciation of the phoneme /s/.</p>	<p>pairs and organize them with the teacher guidance; she writes it on the board in order to all the learners can observe the correct organization. After that, the teacher models the pronunciation of the tongue twister emphasizing the use of the phoneme /s/ at the beginning of the words. Then, learners should practice it being aware of the sound of the phoneme /s/. Finally, the teacher calls one learner to read the tongue twister in front of the class.</p>	
<p>While-recording</p>	<p>To acquire pronunciation awareness.</p> <p>To practice the /s/ phoneme's pronunciation.</p>	<p>The teacher gives a text to the learners in which most of the words start with /s/. The idea is that they have to read it considering the prior explanation the teacher gave them about the pronunciation of the phoneme. Learners have the opportunity to ask for clarifications and doubts about the topic.</p> <p>Once they have practiced, they use the tools provided by the teacher (computer and microphone) to record their voices</p>	<p>25 minutes</p>

		reading the prior text the teacher gave them.	
Post – recording	To analyze own learning process in terms of pronunciation skills.	Once the learners have recorded their voices, they should listen to them and take notes of the mistakes they made on it. Then, they should present their recording and notes to the teacher. In this way, she listens to them and evaluate their pronunciation progress; she gives them suggestion and recommendations about it.	10 minutes
Evaluation	To reflect on their progress in terms of pronunciation skills.	The teacher gives learners the learner’s journal format in order to reflect on their progress in terms of pronunciation skills.	10 minutes