

THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRONUNCIATION  
THROUGH READING ALOUD

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LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA INGLESA

2014

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UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA  
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### RESÚMEN

El presente proyecto de clase busca dar cuenta de que tan efectivo puede ser la implementación de la estrategia de la lectura en voz alta a la hora de mejorar la pronunciación de los estudiantes. Este proyecto se llevó a cabo en una institución de carácter público arrojando un sin número de resultados en su mayoría positivos a través de las distintas actividades realizadas durante tres semestres consecutivos. Nuestra metodología consistió en la lectura de textos seleccionados en voz alta con el fin de modelar la relación del texto Inglés con la pronunciación. Posteriormente, se monitoreó a los estudiantes mientras leía en voz alta dichos textos proveyéndoles retroalimentación correctiva de estos, dicha retroalimentación fue complementada con instrucción general enfocada en fonética inglesa y su pronunciación. Los resultados arrojados dejaron ver que, sin importar todos los esfuerzos que se hicieron, la pronunciación de los estudiantes no mejoro, lo cual infiere que cuando se trata de mejorar la pronunciación, la lectura en voz alta carece de eficacia.

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### ABSTRACT

This class project seeks to show how effective the implementation of reading aloud strategy can be in improving students' pronunciation. This project was conducted in a public institution during three consecutive semesters. Two types of reflection were used: Reflection-in-action and Reflection-on-action. Our methodology consisted of reading selected texts aloud so as to model the relation of English text to pronunciation. We then monitored students' reading aloud of the same texts, giving corrective feedback and complimenting this with general instruction focused on English phonetics and pronunciation. No matter how hard we tried we did not find that students pronunciation improved that much. This suggests that when it comes to improving student's pronunciation, our reading aloud based methodology lacked effectiveness.

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### DEDICATION

*I dedicate my classroom project to my family and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving sons, Johan David Flaco Posada and Juan Diego Flaco Valencia who supported me emotionally throughout the process.*

*Att: Yoan Manuel Flaco Garcia*

*I want to dedicate this classroom project to all people who supported me during my university years. My dear mom who deserves all my respect and love, she is the main person whom I want to dedicate this valuable work since she was the main person who mostly helped me to keep my mind on my goals. She taught me I could do everything if I had the willingness to do it. Thanks, dear mom, I love you!*

*Att: Yuberth Andres Mosquera Perea*

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### JUSTIFICATION

The project was carried out with the purpose of improving English language learners' pronunciation through reading aloud strategies. We decided to work on this project because we have seen that we could provide an innovative way to teach English. In addition, we wanted to know whether or not this project would yield positive results for teaching and improving English learner's competences. On the other hand, we have also noticed that there was a problem related to learning and teaching English. Documents like *Guia 22* published by the Colombian Ministry of Education have established standards to follow for learning English as a foreign language. Successful English language learners need to achieve many competencies. According to CEFR (2001), the communicative competences are divided into three: Linguistic, Pragmatic, and Sociolinguistic. For this project, we focused mostly on the linguistic competence which includes lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge, skills and other dimensions of language as a system.

Although there are other methods for teaching pronunciation to primary students such as drills, minimal pair, games, among others, those were not considered for the teaching of English within our project. We chose reading aloud since this technique offers opportunities for practicing pronunciation without requiring students to confront difficult issues of grammar and vocabulary. Also, this technique could be used to provide learners with authentic written discourse.



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We did not expect that by using this technique, at the end of the project, the students were going to have a perfect pronunciation since we recognized that having such pronunciation would take a long time. Reading aloud is not a method that Colombian English teachers commonly use in their classes. However, that does not mean that this activity could not be helpful for improving and getting students practicing pronunciation. In some countries of the world, where English is taught as a foreign language, reading aloud is an important activity for learners' language development as reports Huang (2010) in *Reading Aloud in Foreign Language Teaching*.

Due to our own experience as high school students and now as language major tenth semester students, we have observed that most of our English teachers' syllabus and lesson plans focus on the teaching of vocabulary, grammar and on the teaching of words in isolation. Therefore, we felt that this was the suitable moment for balancing the teaching of English by introducing a technique for helping students to improve and practice pronunciation.

It seemed to us that teachers have neglected the teaching and development of phonological competences. According to The Common European Framework (CEF) (2001), the phonological competence is related to pronunciation and its sub-skills like intonation, stress, prosody, among others. English language learners need to achieve all of the competencies - listening, speaking, reading and writing - to become proficient language users. Pronunciation is important in communication since to understand an utterance, oral production needs to be as accurate as possible.

As a result of lack of pronunciation teaching and practice many English learners have not been able to develop this ability adequately. Many teachers spend a great deal of time getting

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students to learn points of grammar and vocabulary and practicing functional dialogues, whereas pronunciation is not included in their lessons or it is only barely touched upon. (Harmer, 2011, P.248). Thus, one could infer that students do not achieve good pronunciation, and as a consequence, they fail to be understood when they engage in oral interaction. In fact, Kelly (1994), suggests that when learners consistently mispronounce phonemes it can be extremely difficult for native and non-native speakers to understand them. According to Ehrlich & Avery (2013) many teachers feel that they do not have enough training or expertise to teach pronunciation, so they feel it is safer not to do it. Other teachers believe they do not have an “ear” for pronunciation so they feel they really wouldn’t be helping their students if they teach pronunciation.

When teachers and students have to deal simultaneously with grammar, vocabulary, reading and speaking, it is may be difficult for them to devote adequate time and attention to pronunciation. According to Dalton (2002) teachers are comfortable teaching reading, writing, listening and to a degree, general oral skills, but when it comes to pronunciation they often lack the basic knowledge of articulatory phonetics (not difficult to acquire) to offer our students anything more than rudimentary (and often unhelpful) advice such as, "it sounds like this ; uuuh. Teachers naturally try to maximize student talking time and minimize teacher talking time, but an unintended result of this is that students receive only limited exposure to correct pronunciation. Harmer (2011) suggests that learners should be given the opportunity to hear real spoken discourse so that they can receive input about the sounds of the words. Being exposed to authentic discourse in such way could help the learner achieve competence in pronunciation.

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### TEACHING OBJECTIVES

#### GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

- To examine how students, improve their pronunciation through reading aloud.
- Create habits of correct English pronunciation in our students

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Improve student's pronunciation through reading aloud.

- Show that there are other ways to improve pronunciation, as alternatives to those proposed by the Colombian educational system.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

##### GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- To continue with the improvement of students' pronunciation through reading aloud.

##### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To differentiate the sounds of the words, when a text is being read by the teacher or students.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

The Colombian government has promoted English teaching in the Colombian education system for the last six decades. The government has provided some documents, articles, and training about how English has to be taught such as *Colombia Bilingue, El Reto*. Most of its proposals for teaching English in Colombia are based on the communicative approach. This approach emphasizes the idea that learners should communicate efficiently in different domains in which they operate: personal, public, occupational and educational domain (CEFR, 2001, P.45). In order to achieve that purpose it is necessary to increase learners' competences in the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing). According to the Colombian Education Ministry, "La enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas, tal como su nombre lo indica, privilegia el uso del lenguaje como elemento básico en la comunicación a través de la interacción. Mediante la apropiación del lenguaje, el educando se ubica en un lugar dentro de una compleja red de relaciones que lo definen tanto a él como a la sociedad. La ubicación en dicha red depende del grado de desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa." (Uso & Martinez, 2006, P. 15-18). One of the purposes of the Ministry is that Colombians make use of the foreign language properly, and in order to achieve that goal, pronunciation is an essential element to promote communication since without a good pronunciation students cannot make themselves understand even if they have strengths in the other communicative skills. In our experience as students in the Colombian

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education system, the teaching of English has not followed the principle of the communicative approach in dealing with pronunciation. Instead of having students interact orally with their partners (and teacher) for improving their pronunciation as they should be doing through the communicative approach, they just listen to a teacher-provided model and repeat or imitate it. The communicative approach allows teachers to use any methodology they think could be useful to achieve the communicative purpose, and for this classroom project, we used the reading aloud strategy to improve students' pronunciation.

### PRONUNCIATION

#### Teaching Pronunciation

Over time many methods, techniques, and approaches such as the Direct Method, the Naturalistic Method, the Audiolingual Method, the Oral approach, and the Communicative approach have addressed some aspects about how pronunciation should be taught, and the methods and techniques to be applied to achieve good pronunciation. In Colombia, most of the techniques have been based on the Communicative approach not only to improve pronunciation but also to develop other communicative skills. Through this classroom project, we focused more on the Direct Method and in the Audiolingual Method since those approaches are more closely related to our project.

The Direct Method, consists of using visual aids as a support for conveying meaning about objects, people or actions when teaching the target language since learners were not

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allowed to speak their mother language or translate into it. The goal was learning how to use another language to communicate (Larsen-Freeman & Andersson, 2013).

Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (2010), explain that teaching English pronunciation by means of the Direct Method was by induction and imitation. Thus, the second language learners' ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the L2 was supposed to lead to the development of an acceptable pronunciation without the intervention of any explicit information or instruction. For example, if teachers uttered something, or if a recording is played learners imitated this input. According to this, students improve their pronunciation outcomes without any pronunciation instruction, they just need to be exposed to the sound then they reproduce that sound in the same way they listened to it. It seems that this approach relied on the formation of habits through repetitions to improve students' pronunciation.

Another important method was the Audio-lingual method. The Audio-lingual method is closely related to pronunciation since it involves frequent repetition and practice to establish good L2 habits. The audio-linguistic involves repetition of sentences and dialogs to learn vocabulary and grammar. As reported by Comings, Garner & Smith (2002), for many years, the Audio-lingual method dominated English-language instruction in the United States. In this method, speaking skills are taught by having students repeat sentences and recite textbook dialogues. The theory behind the Audio-lingual method is that the students learn to repeat by practicing grammatical structure until producing those structures has become automatic. Skinner approach (which is also known as The Behaviorism Approach or Learning Theory, stated that behavior which is reinforced tends to be repeated (i.e. strengthened); behavior which is not

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reinforced tends to die out-or be extinguished (i.e. weakened) supported the learning theory behind Audio-lingualism: the more a person repeats things, the more likely that person is to learn them. the same happens with reading aloud. After a word is read and/or repeated by students for some time, the students will end up recognizing it and also, they will enable themselves to infer the correct pronunciation in words which have the same pattern. Good readers appear to identify unfamiliar and unknown words by finding similarities to known words. After some phonics exercises and practice, children can get the approximate pronunciation of some words. (R. C. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilking, 1985) example: the words, take, make, brake, and so on. On the other hand, Danuta Gabryś-Barker, Adam Wojtaszek (2014) stated that learning pronunciation through reading aloud, focusing on words difficult to pronounce could be possible through repetition.

Reading aloud allows students to be exposed to some phonological components of the English language such as stress, placement and linking that are found in spoken communication. Reading Aloud helps to enhance the overall rhythm of the language (Gabrielatos, 2002; Gibson, 2008; Wrembel, 2001). Marianne Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (1996) stated that a good pronunciation practice would be for students read aloud poems, speeches, plays and dialogues focused on stress, timing, and intonation, and this technique may or not involve memorization of a text.

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### PRONUNCIATION FEATURES

In order to allow students to have good pronunciation practice so that they can be involved in oral communication effectively, they must not only be exposed to phonemes and (vocabulary) but also to variations on the pitch of voice and stressed words among others. Those components of pronunciation consist of intonation, phrasing, and stress, timing rhyming, voice quality, gestures, and expression. Such components are known as pronunciation features (Gilakjani,2012). Pronunciation may be examined in terms of two main features which may, in turn, be subdivided into additional aspects. On the one hand are phonemes which consist of consonants; voiced and unvoiced and vowels; single vowels and diphthongs. On the other hand, are the suprasegmental features which include intonation and stress; word stress and sentences stress (Kelly, 2000, p. 1).

Phonemes are the discrete sounds within a language. Although there are slight differences in how individuals articulate sounds, we can still describe reasonably accurately how each sound is produced. There is a relation between sounds and the letters that represent each sound, and sounds may be similar to one another. With respect to meaning, there are differences when one phoneme is replaced by another (Kelly, 2000). Brown (2003), asserts that phonemes are perceived more when a speaker mispronounce a word that he/she tries to say, lamp /p/ instead of saying /lamb/ for example. Consonant sounds include voiced and unvoiced sounds. Consonant sounds occur when “a part of the mouth is closed and the air behind it is released suddenly – for example, v as in van, b as in bun”. And unvoiced consonants occur when “air is pushed through a narrow part of the mouth – for example, fa in fan, th as in thin)” (Brown, 2003 cited in



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Gilakjani 2012). Vowels, on the other hand, are voiced even those found near to one another. When vowel sounds shift from one to another, as is the case of “late” /ei/, these combinations are called diphthongs.

Another feature of pronunciation has to do with suprasegmentals such as stress and intonation. Kelly (2000) names as important elements of suprasegmental features intonation and stress, the first being “the way in which the pitch of the voice goes up down in the course of an utterance...” and stress being the feature that “gives rhythm to speech”. Therefore, intonation and stress within utterances are connected patterns that communicate meaning (Kelly, 2000).

### READING ALOUD

It has been said that reading aloud has some disadvantages as a technique. For example; when students read aloud they do not focus on the meaning; the reader focuses more on pronouncing new and the unknown words. Therefore, they cannot answer comprehension questions about the reading. It is also said that most of the time when someone is reading aloud, the rest of the class often does not understand what the reading is about due to the reader's poor voice projection and/or poor pronunciation, or because they do not pay much attention. According to Lemov (2011), if one student is reading and his/her classmates are listening passively, the result is an ineffective activity since listeners will not understand what the reading consists of.

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Gibson (2008) reports that ELT experts and educators have discussed whether or not reading aloud is an appropriate way to learn English. Many of them argue against it, stating that reading aloud is ineffective for developing pronunciation and reading strategies, and for grasping meaning from texts. It is also argued that reading aloud is not useful for improving pronunciation in spontaneous conversation and that reading aloud is a difficult task even for native speakers. For these reasons many teachers refuse to implement reading aloud since they see reading aloud as something that is not beneficial in classes. However, reading aloud can be useful in many cases and circumstances; for example; to reinforce the relation between text and pronunciation and as pronunciation practice. Gabrielatos, C. (2002) stated that reading aloud is a classroom procedure which can be used to improve pronunciation.

Reading aloud reflects a student's decoding skills; it is not an indicator of a student's reading comprehension skills (Hamilton & Shinn, 2003). Lee (2005) explains that decoding is the ability to pronounce written words. "There are some arguments that support the idea that reading aloud is an appropriate strategy since this strategy can be an engaging, motivating and effective means of language instruction for learners at any age or level of proficiency and from any background" (Porcaro, 2012. Reading aloud as a listening activity can be used as a creative way to learn pronunciation feature such as intonation, stress, prosody among others as suggest Kelly (2000).

Aryani, Marbun & Riyanti (xxxx) say that:

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“Reading aloud is a classroom activity which has fallen in and out of favor with teachers at various times. The main argument against it is that it can interfere with successful pronunciation; spelling clearly affects pronunciation performance adversely. But reading aloud offers opportunities for the study of the link between spelling and pronunciation, of stress and intonation, and of the linking of sounds between words in connected speech” (p.4)

Subiakto & Nababan (1993, p.168), claim that reading aloud can support the pronunciation skill. Huang (2010, p.149), adds not only that reading aloud is a help for this sub-skill of speaking but also that “reading aloud has a function to increasing oral English and can practice pronunciation”. Reading aloud as a listening activity has been used as a creative way to learn pronunciation feature like intonation, stress, prosody among others as suggested by Kelly(2000).

Reading aloud is used by teachers to promote the habit of reading and to practice pronunciation, but also to help students comprehend text (Subyakto & Nababan, 1993, p.168). Huang (2010) lists five functions of reading aloud in a foreign language and one of its functions is to practice pronunciation.

Gibson (2008) conducted her research with 27 teachers and some (7) adult EFL learners, her purpose was to find how and why reading aloud is still used to support language learning. This study showed that language teachers prefer to use this method in their class because this method is useful to practice speaking, pronunciation and intonation. Furthermore, this serves to improve fluency, practice reading skill and learn vocabulary.

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Mantali, Talib, & Manu (2013), conducted a quantitative study with the objective of finding out whether students could increase pronunciation significantly or not by using reading aloud technique. Research was conducted at the Grades of SMP Negeri 1 Batudaa of academic in the year 2012. The participants of this research consisted of a group of 24 students (13 female and 11 male). The researchers implemented a pre-experimental test which consisted of two phases. In these two phases, students SMP Negeri 1 Batudaa were given a pre-test and pro-test in which such students are asked to read aloud in order to assess pronunciation. The score the students got in the pre-test was 115 whereas in the post-test they got 197. It is evidenced by seeing the score of the students' post-test is higher than the pre-test score. So, these results suggest that the pronunciation of students improved after applying the reading aloud technique in teaching reading.

Reading Aloud is an appropriate method for students to practice and improve their pronunciation. However, there are some challenges that students must overcome if we want students to use this strategy. Those challenges are orthographic strategies, the management of the decoding reading process, and knowledge of phonemes, graphemes and other components of English language.

The process of reading a text in a silent way or aloud in L1 and L2 is very different. Before reading in English, learners need to acquire orthographic knowledge of that language in order to correctly read aloud written texts due to the fact that L1 and L2 have

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different spelling systems. Otherwise, learners would be reading in English based on the strategies they have for reading L1. “Readers of other L1s, because of their orthographies, may not have developed these strategies, and so they will need to acquire them in order to read fluently in English. Meanwhile, they are likely to rely on their L1 reading strategies when reading in English” (Gibson, 2008). It is possible that words in English texts look like L1; in this case L2 learners can read words and learn those by visualizing. Word recognition is known as automatic decoding; it implies recognizing words at a glance. (Mikulecky, 2006). This is one of a variety of strategies that a reader use to comprehend a text. However, this strategy not only can be useful for this purpose but also for reading aloud with accurate pronunciation. When readers recognize a word within a text, they not only know about its meaning or its category but also aspects related to its pronunciation (Cameron, 2001, P.77). Reading aloud could be a good strategy for students to improve their pronunciation if this is accompanied by other pronunciation activities, such as teaching the phonemes, and the phonemic symbols. We should consider that “a letter of the alphabet or a group of letters that represent a single phoneme is called as grapheme, and in reading, the transformation of the graphemes into phonemes is referred as decoding” (Lee, 2005). It means that due to the fact that readers already have acquired the ability to translate words into phonemes, it is possible to read. For Lee (2005), “decoding is the ability to pronounce the written word.” Reading in L1 is easy since the reader already possesses some knowledge in relation to how a word sounds. In order for L2 learners to read as any English native speaker does, they must

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learn competences that native speakers have acquired for this. This means that for second language users being able to read in both ways, silent or aloud, they must possess competences for spelling words, and being able to recognize and decode English words.

Some second language students find it difficult to internalize the sound of the phonemes, and they try to use the same patterns they employ when reading in Spanish since they think that the English alphabet has the same sound as that of Spanish. As a result, they tend to have many pronunciation problems, making it difficult for them to understand what their teachers and their partners say. Misunderstanding the real sound of the phonemes can affect not only pronunciation but also communication with others.

Spelling is also important for our project since we recognize that Colombian students, who are learning English as a second or foreign language, often fail to read texts correctly. The implication is that readers must have knowledge of the phonemes of the English language. The language possesses 46 different sounds for 26 written symbols. This means that there is not a predictable correspondence between pronunciation and spelling. If students are unaware of this, they cannot read aloud with good pronunciation.

As we stated before, the topics we have presented have much importance in the development of our project since we can understand why our students commit many errors and mistakes when they read. However, the purpose of the previous paragraphs is not to give the foundations for teaching reading but for allowing students to use well the strategy of reading aloud in order to improve and practice pronunciation. In other words, students will not be able to read aloud if they possess poor knowledge of the sound of the symbols, so the best way to

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achieve that purpose is that the students read aloud for improving and practice pronunciation in order to know how they should read English. Among the many techniques and methods for teaching reading aloud is the use of phonics, which is a well-known strategy to teach the sounds of letters in a word in order to facilitate reading. This strategy has been considered very useful by the *National Reading Panel (2000)*. Reading in English is not an easy task and even more for students whose native language is Spanish. Phonics provides an opportunity to allow students to compare and contrast how they must read in that language. As our purpose is that learners improve their pronunciation by reading aloud, this would be an adequate tool to allow students to do it.

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### METHODOLOGY

#### CONTEXT

This classroom project was carried out in a public high school named *Institución Educativa Suroriental*; during three semesters from 2014-2 to 2015-2. During the last semester of the first year (2014) and in the first one of 2015, we worked with 5th and 4th graders. In the second semester 2015 we carried out the project with 11<sup>th</sup>, this high school is located in a neighborhood named Boston (Pereira). The students come mainly from very low economic strata (*extrato 1 or 2*). As a public high school, it is subject to the Educative law 115 which (*Ley 115 de Educación*) requires the inclusion of English as a foreign language in the study plan. The basis for lessons plans and the planning of activities of this subject is *Guía 22* (also known as *Estandares Básicos de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera: Inglés*) since this document contains every detail related to communicative competence, level, content, and knowledge that a learner should acquire to be a competent user of English language.

According to the English teaching planning or the high school curriculum, students from 1,2,3,4 and 5<sup>th</sup> grade receive 2 hours of English class while in 6,7,8,9,10 and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the session should last one hour more. The teacher who was in charge of the grade we chose for doing this classroom project did not have formal training as an English teacher, and her command of the language was very limited, however; she was assigned to teach English in the



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fifth-grade class that we chose for our Project. It means that she had to teach English to 5th grade even when that was not her main job. Actually, she was a primary teacher who taught different subjects such as math, Spanish language, geography among other. Also, she was provided with assistance by her daughter when planning the English classes since her daughter was graduated from the English program of *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira*.

As was expected from the beginning of the classroom project planning, one of the problems we faced was the students' low English level since many of them could not speak or write well. However, these kinds of situations are reported by a document of the *British Council, English in Colombia: An Examination of Policy, Perceptions, and Influencing Factors*. The finding in that document related to what we observed, have to do with the fact that "English language learners tend to attribute strong English proficiency to practice and exposure to English speaking media, while low proficiency is blamed on a lack of practice. Another problem that we observed was the number of students, which made it very difficult to give feedback to each one, also to get student's attention. Other problems were the lack of adequate materials and resources for implementing listening and speaking activities and the economic situation of students which made it difficult for them to buy photocopies or printed material.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this classroom project were divided into two groups: the first one consists of fifth-grade students from a public school called *Institución Educativa Suroriental*.

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And the other one was a work team consisting of two pre-service teachers that belonged to Licenciatura de Ingles program of the Universidad.

This implementation was carried out with a group of 35 fifth graders which ages ranging between eight and ten years old. Some of these were Afro-Colombians, most of whom lived in informal settlements “*invasiones*” located in *la Unidad, la curva, and la Laguna* and came from economically disadvantaged families. They had some problems related to transportation, so they had to walk long distances and as a result, they usually arrived late to the classes. Another was the lack of food in their home and due to this “the teacher in charge of the grade sometimes bought some food and distributed it among the students. Finally, they had some difficulties getting school Supplies, so they had to borrow from their peers’ things like pencils, Glue stick, scissors, Backpack, crayons, erasers etc.

During the initial contacts that we made with the students, we asked them which topics they liked the most and they expressed that they loved topics related to sports, music, and animals.

With regard to the practitioner's role, those were, first as designers, to planning all aspects of the class such as, designing the lesson plans, choosing the materials, planning the topics and activities proposed to teach, second to implement the classes, to guide the implementation, being in charge of the classroom and the time management, to find methods that helped the students to work in an appropriate environment, third examine and to monitor students learning from inside and outside the class; practitioners were in charge of assessing learning performance in order to look for strategies to improve learners language proficiency.

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The practitioners performed the role of observers which not only consisted of gather data about the execution of project but also to analyze and reflect on aspect of learning process with regards to our project. All These roles were assigned between the practitioners equally.

### DESIGN

This classroom project was centered on the use of reading aloud in a group of fifth graders who were in A2.1 English level, three-hour per week during three semesters.

During the classes, we used the ESA model proposed by Harmer (1998) that contains three components that are Engage, Study, and Activate, these components were used in each class using its sequence. All the classes were focused on the four skills reading, listening, writing and speaking and it was during the reading section where we implemented our (project) reading aloud activities.

We began the reading aloud activities in the following way. First, the practitioner that was in charge of the class had to expose them to some images to allow students to recall previous knowledge in terms of experiences and predictions, also create a good environment and raise interest and motivation towards the reading; then he modeled the reading. This means that he read the whole text. Second, the teacher asked each student to read a paragraph or a short sentence. During this section if one student made a pronunciation error, the practitioner corrected him or her. In case that one word was mispronounced by more than one student, the teacher only corrected the first student to avoid having to spend a lot of time correcting the same word. The

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third step consisted on the recognition of the phonemes with which the students had problems in order to implement activities to correct them. Another way we used to correct pronunciation was, for example if the students had problem with the word “abroad” found in the sentence (my brother traveled abroad last year) we asked them the following question (where did my brother travel last year?) In order that they repeated the mispronounced word “abroad” If the error persisted, proceed to indicate the correct way to pronounce that word.

Finally, the other teacher was in charge of taking notes and collecting data about any event regarding to our project for example: the teacher and the students’ performance, students’ progress, things that needed to be improve or avoid and what to do different for next time and it was during the following class that we implemented pronunciation activities taking into consideration the difficulties that students had with some words and phonemes.

## RESOURCES

For our implementation, we used pictures, video beam, markers, posters, big books, flash cards, computer, CD player, and speakers. Both pictures and flashcards were utilized by students to learn the language in context without having to use the mother language (*Spanish*) also to contextualize our students about the subject that was going to be taught during that class. The used of posters within the English classes were planned for saving time in the explanations of topics or any particular aspect of the lessons, so those posters contained the most relevant information about the main topic of the lesson. For example, explanation of words meaning,

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sentences structures, summaries so on. The big books used for reading aloud included texts like “Aesop’s Fables”, Dr. Seuss’s “Green Eggs and Ham”, and some tongue-twisters, such as Fox in Sox by Dr. Seuss, Dr. Seuss's O Say Can You Say?, sung by Ian Mackintosh, Donald O'Connor and Gene Kelly in "Singing in the Rain" (1952), by Tim McCauley, age 8 and etcetera those were used in order to reinforce pronunciation. The CD player was used for listening and pronunciation activities, we played songs, audio books; and finally the computer was used for that purpose too and for displaying images or videos through the video beam projector.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE CLASSROOM PROJECT

Although our classroom project has reached its aim that was to show how effective the use of reading aloud to improve pronunciation was, there were some unavoidable limitations. First, the class time limit. The English classes lasted just one hour in which we had to deal with different tasks such as collecting homework, talking about ground rules, solving students’ doubts, following the curriculum, among others, and as a result we did not have enough time to implement all the activities that were planned. Second, Learners’ English level. Many of the students were not even at a Basic English level so it was really difficult for them to achieve the aim of the project. Third, the lack of technological tools such as speakers, CD player, and smart TV in some of the classrooms also the lack of a fully-equipped library, where they could find,

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texts, Jokes, tales, fables, poems and games of words for practicing reading aloud. Finally, the lack of motivation and interest of the students in participating in the activities.

The Pedagogical Implications of the Use of reading aloud in the L2 Classroom to improve pronunciation.

The benefits that reading aloud can bring to learners related to pronunciation are innumerable. However, its efficacy lies in the way this technique is implemented. Due to our own experience as high school students and now as language major tenth semester students, we can say that reading aloud was something new for us since it was not implemented in the schools that we attended, so we decided to implement it and design activities or situations in which reading aloud could be carried out. This means selection of appropriate material and content, for example, playing a cartoon movie or video with its script. Selected scenes from popular movies or television shows are potentially engaging and entertaining material from which to base reading aloud as well as drama reenactment activities (Gilner & Morales, 2000).

Although it has been said that reading aloud is a useful strategy to improve pronunciation, there is still controversy and many doubts about its effectiveness. We wanted to implement reading aloud since we thought that through this methodology, the students will significantly improve their pronunciation but some interesting points to mention about our implementation is that no matter how hard we tried, we did not find that students pronunciation improve that much. When we decided to conducted this classroom project we wondered why many teachers did not apply reading aloud in their classes if this seemed to be a good strategy to improve learner's pronunciation but after we have finished our implementation we dare to say that may be one of

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the main reasons is that reading aloud does not work when it comes to improving student's pronunciation. This does not mean that in any way they cannot improve their pronunciation since we noticed that they achieved the correct pronunciation of some words but this requires much time, and it took longer than we were expecting. Also, they did not pronounce these words correctly when using them in spoken discourse. As a result, it is our recommendation that if someone wants to experiment in his/her classes the use of reading aloud to improve learner's pronunciation, the English level of the students should be taken into consideration. In addition, teachers who want to implement this strategy need to have a good English proficiency level and good pronunciation since they will be in charge of improving student's pronunciation; also they must make good choices of materials to motivate, engage and catch students' attention.

### FINDINGS

Reading aloud is something that our students had not been commonly exposed to in their English classes; therefore, some students at the beginning of the implementation failed to participate in such activities. The 5th-grade learners to whom we taught English were asked to read a paragraph of no more than six lines at some stage of the class (mostly in the practice stage). However, some of them said to us. "No, we won't do it!" This group of students preferred to keep talking to their partners and trying not to be asked to read, ignoring the teaching, and even inventing excuses for not participating in class. It is probable that because they are not used to reading, they were not interested in doing this, and that during their period of schooling their

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classes lacked reading activities. Most of the students who were part of this project said that they did not like reading.

We introduced some vocabulary with its pronunciation to the fifth graders and they produced those in the speaking and reading aloud activities. During those activities, we observed that some learners mispronounced many words that contained the phoneme /th/, and words that ended with /d/ /k/. For example, the students mispronounced the ending phonemes of the words good, book, teeth, and among other words. So we (the teachers) noticed these mistakes and we gave feedback in order to get the students to correct them. Richards and Charles Lockhart (1997) cited by Akhter (2007, P.9) mention some strategies for giving feedback to students when they make pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary mistakes. These strategies consists of instructions to get students to repeat, helping students to find the mistake, making commentaries and explanations about the mistake made, using another student to correct the mistake, and showing mistakes by using gestures. The teachers used two strategies to correct mistakes in pronunciation. The first strategy had to do with explaining the mistakes that they made when reading aloud the short text. The second strategy was just to indicate the students the mistake of the word they uttered by repeating again that word in a better pronunciation version instead of telling them directly they had made a mistake and to correct the pronunciation. It is important to consider when we should call students' attention to their mistakes and how we should do this. (Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart, 1997).

cited by Akhter, 2007). We used to read aloud to learners and check students' pronunciation by asking questions in order to indicate them where the mistakes were. After students received



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feedback on pronunciation, they were asked to read the text for the second time. During this activity, we noticed that some could pronounce better words ending in /d/ /k/, other student committed the same mistakes, but they tried to correct themselves. When they read aloud, they pronounced the words correctly, even though they did not understand their meanings. Most of them when they were asked to read, expressed that they did not like to read in front of their partners because of their poor pronunciation; also they said that they had never being exposed to reading activities in which they had to read for the whole class.

Students tried to read in English as they used to do in Spanish. This might indicate they were unaware of the differences between the two languages in relation to the pronunciation. After we wrote some sentences on the board, gave them a worksheet, and asked the students to read them, the students read those words using both pronunciation systems of Spanish and English for decoding. For example, by reading the sentence the color is green, we noticed that the students read the word *the* as the Spanish word *de* and the word *green* as the Spanish form *gren* whereas they pronounce the words *color* and *is* as these sound in English. The English word *is* sound similar to the Spanish word-sounding *is*. Although *is* does not exist as a word in Spanish, the sound *is* (in English) also exist in that language.

Through the whole implementation process, we observed that the most of the students did not participate in activities related to reading aloud unless these activities involved big books with colorful images and engaging topics such as stories, fairy tales,

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etcetera since they got engaged with those things. Turkington & Harris (2006) an individual with a strong visual learning style should be taught to read with an emphasis on the shapes of the words, images, and pictures. According to Gardner (1991), Visual-Spatial can be taught through Tools include models, graphics, charts, photographs, drawings, videos, and texts with pictures. According to the Oxford University Press ELT; Reading aloud to work on pronunciation will be most effective for the children if they are not distracted by trying to understand the text.

After hearing read aloud texts related to holidays, vacations and practicing some tongue twisters, the students were smiling, participating and answering some of the questions that the teacher asked them regarding those activities. In most of the reading activities, colorful pictures and flash cards were used. Once they saw the images, they tried to infer what the reading was going to be about, so this made them think the activity was going to be fun. Also when we played or sang along a song script shown on the TV screen, they followed the lyric and sang along, then after we have finished with this activity they told us to do that again, so that suggested us that they really loved that activity. During some reading activities, it was evidenced that the students enjoyed listening to how the native English speakers articulate sounds and love the idea of speaking English since once we exposed them to some authentic listening then they tried to imitate the native accent, articulating some sounds like the native one in order to improve their pronunciation. However, students were discouraged when the teacher corrected them and they noticed that the way they did was far away from how really those words are supposed to be pronounced.

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### REFLECTION

Learning English as a Foreign Language involves the development of language skills and communicative competence and one of the most difficult competences to achieve is good pronunciation. In the school where the project was implemented, there are few opportunities to practice oral communication so some students find the English language hard to speak with other partners in the classroom because of their level, also hours assigned for the English classes are not enough. As a result, our students have some pronunciation problems and they feel that are not able to speak in English.

Some of the conclusions we drew were these: reading aloud was useful since it helped them to practice the English sounds but this strategy did not engage and motivate students to participate. This contradicts what some authors have said. According to Gabrielatos (2002) Potential benefits of using this technique include reinforcing sound-spelling associations, and encouraging autonomous learning as a task students engage in on their own. On the other hand, implementing this strategy was not an easy task because there were some factors such as, lack of time for practicing and students' English level that hindered this process.

The participants of the classroom project expressed that they did not like reading. After they were asked to read a short text some of them complained that they did not feel comfortable when reading aloud, since they thought that their pronunciation was poor. However, some of them did read aloud, but they committed many errors.

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Learners appeared to use principles of Spanish spelling-sound correspondence when reading in English. For example, when they saw the word (MANY) which is pronounced /'meni/, most of the students pronounce it like /mani/.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that sometimes they pronounced words correctly but in later classes they seemed to have forgotten these same words and how to pronounce them.

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### CONCLUSION

The Project we implemented in *Institucion Educativa Suroriental* with fifth grade students had three main purposes. First, we wanted to find an innovative way of dealing with pronunciation practice by using Reading Aloud technique. Also, we wanted to know if this technique might be effective for both teaching and improvement of the competence of students in English. In addition, we wanted to integrate Reading Aloud technique with an English syllabus consisting of lexis and grammar and harmonizing the teaching of English. In spite of finding theoretical support for carrying out our Project and using material suited to such a purpose, we did not accomplish the result we expected.

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### APPENDIX

#### KEY TERMS

**Reading Aloud** is a strategy in which a teacher sets aside time to read orally to students could be a story, short texts, a fairy tale, a fable, a joke, and so on.

**Suprasegmental** features are those articulatory features which are superimposed over the most than a segment (i.e., vowel or consonant); they include stress and intonation.

**Curriculum** is the structure that shows the way how teachers intervene and develop the necessary skills, in different grades.

**L1** refers to First language (mother tongue)

**Mother tongue** refers to the first language that you learn when you are a baby, rather than a language learned at school or as an adult.

**L2** refers to Second language.

**EFL** refers to English as a Foreign Language.

**ESL** refers to English as a Second Language.