EFL learners' perception of pronunciation instruction

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Supervisor: Dr. Višnja Pavičić Takač, Full Professor

Osijek, 2018

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

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Diplomski rad

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Abstract

This research study examined the effects of contemporary English as a Foreign language (EFL) teaching on student's attitudes towards how they're being taught pronunciation. The research included 145 high school learners from grammar school in Županja, Croatia. The participants were first recorded reading a small text which contained selected phonemes and lexical units, and were then given a questionnaire to fill out. The questionnaire included questions about their age, gender, final grade from last year, the age at which they started learning English, as well as questions concerning their attitudes towards EFL classes and the main source for their knowledge of pronunciation. The reading was later graded for pronunciation accuracy. The questionnaire showed that the majority of participants felt that they learned more about correct pronunciation from incidental learning, while the results of the test showed that there was no statistical difference in accuracy between participants who felt that they learned more from EFL classes and those that felt they learned more from incidental learning. Also, no significant correlation was found between the number of years they have been studying English and their accuracy scores.

Keywords: pronunciation, EFL teaching, incidental learning, impact, accuracy

Sažetak

Ovo istraživanje ispitalo je utjecaj nastave engleskog jezika na stavove koje učenici imaju prema načinu poučavanja izgovora. Istraživanje je uključivalo 145 učenika opće gimnazije u Županji. Učenike se prvo snimalo dok su čitali kraći tekst koji je sadržavao izabrane foneme i leksičke jedinice te su popunjavali upitnik koji je sadržavao pitanja vezana za dob, spol, prijašnju konačnu ocjenu iz engleskog, dob kada su počeli učiti engleski. Osim toga ispitivao se njihov stav prema nastavi engleskog jezika i što misle da je bio glavni izvor njihovog znanja izgovora engleskog jezika. Čitanje se kasnije ocjenjivalo s obziram na točnost izgovora. Upitnik je pokazao da većina učenika misli da su više naučili iz slučajnog učenja. Rezultati ispitivanja su pokazali da ne postoji statistička razlika u točnosti između učenika u dvije skupine, također nije pronađena značajna korelacije između godina provedenih učeći engleski i rezultata točnosti izgovora.

Ključne riječi: izgovor, nastava engleskog jezika, slučajno učenje, utjecaj, točnost

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1. Theoretical part

Correct pronunciation, meaning accurate production of sounds and phonemes specific to the English language, has always been an integral part of communication in English, especially with the rise of new technologies that bring people new ways of communicating with each other because correct pronunciation leads to better intelligibility. The most important breakthrough is the rise of free voice and video calls because these serve to provide an experience as close to face to face communication as possible. As people are starting to communicate more through speech, thanks to modern technology, with writing slowly becoming a secondary and quick form of communication, accurate pronunciation is becoming even more important due to the position of the English language as today's *lingua franca*. In spite of that, pronunciation is not given sufficient attention in EFL classes today.

1.1. What is pronunciation

The Oxford dictionary simply defines pronunciation as "The way in which a word is pronounced." The Cambridge dictionary as "how words are pronounced". These definitions, while correct, are incomplete and fail to encompass the full meaning of pronunciation. Pennington and Richards (1986) say that pronunciation has been viewed as the correct production of sounds. That definition is similar to the one Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) give with pronunciation being "the production of significant sound". Jones (1909) gives a definition of "good" speech i.e. correct pronunciation as "a way of speaking which is clearly intelligible to all ordinary people". The fact that Gerald Kelly (1990) devotes an entire chapter of his book to describing what pronunciation is and describing its parts shows how complex the notion of pronunciation is. In that chapter he divides pronunciation into two main features: phonemes and suprasegmental features. The former is then divided into consonants and vowels, and the latter is divided into intonation and stress. All of these features are further divided into more specific aspects. In addition, he divides the study of pronunciation into phonetics, concerned with the production and physical nature of sounds, and phonology, concerned with interpretation and systematization of sounds. Kelly indirectly defines pronunciation as a complex part of language which consists of different intricate parts that make it difficult to exactly define, study and teach. This breakdown alone shows the complexity of pronunciation and possibly already hints at the problems teachers have when teaching pronunciation and that students have when acquiring correct pronunciation

It may be even harder to pinpoint what correct pronunciation is because of the different types of accents and variants in the English language. Many people might agree that Received Pronunciation (the pronunciation most often heard used by announcers on British television) is the most accurate accent of British English, but might disagree on which American English accent is the most correct. This is a problem for students because they should decide which accent and variant of English to use and might perceive some accents and variants as correct or incorrect if they are not guided in their pronunciation. An elegant solution for this would be to say that accurate or correct pronunciation is one that falls in line with the norms of the accent chosen by the speaker. This means that, if students choose to speak with an American English accent, they should not be discouraged from using it, but instead should be advised to follow the guidelines of that accent so as to make their pronunciation of the accent correct.

1.2. Attitudes towards teaching pronunciation and pronunciation in general

The main problem with pronunciation may be the attitude of researchers and teachers have towards it. Kelly (1969:87) best puts this situation into perspective by dubbing it "the Cinderella of language teaching". Using this term, he points out how neglected pronunciation has been, but also goes on to say that there might be a bright future for it somewhere down the line. Many other researchers share his view and concerns saying that the dismissal of pronunciation has affected learners "often with detrimental effects" (Isaacs, 2013).

This situation and view have remained the same for decades now as researchers' view pronunciation as "meaningless non-communicative drill-and-exercise gambits" (Morley, 1991:486). Some researchers also feel that "for the time being, precise pronunciation may be an unrealistic goal for teachers to set for their learners and in their teaching" (Pica, as cited in Barrera-Pardo, 2004:7) or that some teachers place little importance on pronunciation due to their feeling that it is "a component of linguistics rather than conversational fluency" (Pennington, as cited in Gilakjani, 2011:77), attitudes towards pronunciation further cemented by some researchers' findings (e.g. Bongaerts et al (1997), Kendrick (1997), Moyer (1999) all cited in Barrera-Pardo, 2004) that correct pronunciation is extremely influenced by exposure. These findings bring on an air of pessimism towards teaching pronunciation by making it seem that exposure or immersion into input-rich environments is the only way towards correct pronunciation. This has put teaching pronunciation in a situation where learners are taught the basics of the English sound system at the start of learning and after which progress grinds to a halt due to a lack of emphasis (Elliot (1995), as cited in Gilakjani, 2011).

The combination of dismissal of pronunciation being irrelevant and the pessimism of it

being unteachable, which will be discussed in later chapters, is, at best, disconcerting, taking into account what was said at the beginning of this chapter. If this trend continues, today's learners will grow up to be programmers unable to communicate with their foreign clients properly during video call meetings, journalists relying on context for their questions to be understood, scientists and researchers being hindered in their work by not being able to work with other scientists from abroad. One feels that, if that were the case, EFL teachers failed because communication is the main aspect of any language.

1.3. Problems with teaching pronunciation

Most of the problems with teaching pronunciation arise from the attitudes towards it. Firstly, these attitudes are the attitudes of EFL teachers who do not feel that it is worth their time and effort to teach pronunciation. Researchers (Elliot, as cited by Gilakjani, 2011) feel that teachers choose to sacrifice it in order to teach other areas of language because they perceive pronunciation as the least useful language skill. This sacrifice of time devoted to pronunciation could be due to the lack of time allotted to EFL classes in schools or due to the backflow from standardized tests. This may very well be the case in Croatia seeing as the *matura* exam focuses primarily on grammar and writing.

Secondly, the teachers who do feel that it is worth their time are scared to teach it because they feel they lack the necessary skills or are otherwise unprepared for the task. (Gilbert, 2016). The fact that this is a problem is obvious to teachers as well as learners due to their dissatisfaction with the tasks connected to pronunciation. The tasks are decontextualized which makes learners disinterested and demotivated to pursue further proficiency which, in turn, demotivates the teachers, causing a negative feedback loop (Madrid and Hughes, 2009). Also, there are innate problems with teachers not feeling comfortable with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) which can be an extremely useful tool for learners. Teachers usually devote a minimal amount of time to IPA usually saying that only those learners who plan on majoring English at college will need it. They can sometimes feel intimidated by it thus using it sparingly and instead opting to use simple phonetic transcription based on the learners' mother tongue (Gilbert, 2016). This can be detrimental to a learner's pronunciation ability and should be avoided (Pennington, as cited in Jones, 1997) because oversimplification leads to incorrect pronunciation, as is the case with Croatian learners pronouncing /ð/ as /d/.

Student motivation is not only a problem when completing tasks but can be a problem with acquiring correct pronunciation in general. In a recent study into differences between

students' attitudes toward their accent, Stanojević et al., (2013) has shown that students' ambitions play a role in their motivation and aptitude to acquire pronunciation. This represents a daunting task for teachers who need to find a way of motivating their students, not only to complete tasks, but to strive for greater proficiency.

More problems became evident through a survey by Robin Walker (1999) which included 350 EFL teachers in Spain. His findings show that, although teachers answered that pronunciation was important, less than 7% planned for pronunciation work, 27% of secondary teachers work on pronunciation purely spontaneously, and only 3% wanted to improve on their teaching skills by seeking help. He feels that teachers are rushed by their syllabus and decide to sacrifice pronunciation, as previously stated.

Other problems include the techniques used by learners to tackle pronunciation. In addition to interference from their mother tongue the learners often use overgeneralization, approximation and avoidance, as stated by Rodney Jones (1997). Jones (1997) goes on to say that this proves that pronunciation acquisition is not an automatic process but rather an active one in which teachers should constantly refresh their learners' knowledge like they do with e.g. grammar, and that they should take into account the techniques that learners use in order to steer them in the right direction.

Teaching self-monitoring may provide learners with an invaluable tool on the road to a better pronunciation because one cannot be able to produce a sound he or she is unfamiliar with and does not hear it. A research by Yule, Hoffman, and Damico (1987) has shown that learners' ability to differentiate between phonemes and their ability to sense if they are making mistakes in pronunciation improve with solving self-monitoring tasks. The downside of those tasks is that learners' communication skills become worse. These findings point to the need for self-monitoring, and to the need of its integration into communication skills due to the negative effects of decontextualization, as has previously been stated.

The importance and advantages of integrating pronunciation is also emphasized by Madrid and Hughes (2009) and Kendrick (1997) who show that integrating speaking and pronunciation exercises with grammatical exercises e.g. using specific grammatical structures greatly improves students' engagement with the task. This means that students know when they are doing a single meaning drill as opposed to a multi-layered exercise.

It is shown that teachers can do a lot to help their learners acquire better pronunciation, not only in but also out of class. The job of the teacher gravitates more and more towards not just teaching their subject, but towards teaching their learners how to learn by giving them

resources and guiding them rather than explicitly teaching. Teachers can point out strategies which learners can implement, thus helping themselves become better speakers (Kendrick, 1997) or give resources that learners can use at home, such as speech-to-text (STT) software. The latter was unimaginable merely two decades ago, but with the improvement of that technology, we now have a reliable measure of learners' pronunciation accuracy without the need for teacher feedback (Mitra et al 2003). They found that learners using STT software did much better on subsequent tests than a control group using conventional methods. This proves that learners can improve their pronunciation with minimal supervision thus showing that, along with other examples throughout this chapter, teachers can, with little effort and training, produce great results with learners' pronunciation.

1.4. Problems with researching pronunciation

Researching pronunciation is problematic for a multitude of reasons, all of which stem from the attitude towards pronunciation. The issues concerning researching pronunciation encompass four general categories: small pool of papers, mutually cancelling research, difficult application of new findings, and general disinterest.

1.4.1. Possible small fund of papers

When starting one's research it is necessary to first research previous findings and papers. This is problematic due to a concerningly small number of papers on the topic and the wide array of problems those papers focus on. Papers can be found but they might not contribute to the research in question because they have a different focus e.g. papers that focus on rectifying malpractices when teaching pronunciation or improving learners' experiences when learning pronunciation. Those types of papers were in part included in this research to provide a general overview and to serve as examples of practices detrimental to teaching pronunciation and to provide insight into the direction in which contemporary research is going, but they cannot comprise the majority of references for this type of research.

This makes researching pronunciation difficult, a point made by Helen Kendrick (1997) in her paper on the importance of keeping learners talking. The fact that fifteen years had passed between the two papers, plus the fact that not a lot has changed since is reason enough to worry.

1.4.2. Mutually exclusive research

Even when papers that fit the focus of a research in question are found there are a lot of

mutually exclusive papers. As Kendrick (1997:546) states:

> "In short then, we cannot assume on the basis of the research available that training will inevitably affect learners' long-term pronunciation accuracy positively, since there is some evidence to suggest that pronunciation instruction is not significantly effective. Conversely there is evidence to show that it is. As teachers, our instinct and experience assure us that it must be, but research suggests that in fact this is far from certain!"

That presents the crux of the problem: the research available is not enough. That is enough to scare a researcher away from a topic but should also serve as a challenge to pioneer pronunciation and to help improve not just EFL learners' experience but to validate teachers who focus on teaching pronunciation. As Kendrick (1997:557) said: "this is an important finding… to teachers who are uncertain of the value of their efforts".

1.4.3. Difficult application of new findings

Even when a breakthrough is made on the topic of pronunciation, that new finding is difficult or maybe even impossible to implement. When we look at the work done by Kendrick (1997) on integration, Mitra et al. (2003) on automated response, Walker (1999) on teacher and learner satisfaction, or Morley (1991) with multidimensional teaching, and then take a look at the changes made to pronunciation teaching with those findings in mind we can see that not a lot has changed in almost 30 years.

The first reason for this is that implementing those changes would require a large amount of reconstructing curricula, syllabi and programmes which have been in place for quite a long time with small changes made along with new findings and breakthroughs. The second reason is the fact that it is hard to measure the effects of certain techniques and methods, as previously said by Kendrick, because one of the more important things to measure is the attitudes of teachers and learners towards certain aspects of pronunciation teaching. The third reason is that the "Cinderella" of EFL still has not become a princess. It is still neglected and marginalized as less important or tedious, especially when teaching segmental features of pronunciation.

1.4.4. General disinterest

Again, the biggest enemy of pronunciation research is the reputation it carries. Researchers could be easily discouraged when their findings fall on deaf ears. Other than that, few people realize the severity of the issue because the topic of pronunciation teaching is not in

the limelight.

In spite of that, there has been a slow but growing interest in pronunciation since the early 1980's with new textbooks in the late 1980's and early 1990's. This rise in interest was brought on by the needs of learners more than by a sudden revelation in the research community on the importance of the area (Morley, 1991). That growing interest and breakthroughs involving new technologies and integration in the last ten to fifteen years show the potential of a bright future for pronunciation with researchers exploring the effects of technology and alternative teaching aids (Mitra, 2014) and with the rising number of researchers focusing on pronunciation in the past few decades (Ketabi, 2015. and Morley, 1991))

1.5. Overview of literature

This part will give a brief overview of the papers used in this research and what they focus on.

Barrera-Pardo (2004) focuses on the effects of pronunciation instructions through the review of twenty-five studies. His aim is to make one think about the position of pronunciation in EFL teaching today.

Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) offer a detailed look at what pronunciation consists of and how to teach it. They focus on critical evaluation of available resources and how to implement ideas in the classroom.

Gilakjani (2011) tries to explore the problems of learning English pronunciation. With a review of misconceptions about pronunciation and factors affecting the acquisition, as well as suggestions for teachers this paper serves as a good basis for anyone researching pronunciation.

Judy Gilbert's article (2016) serves as a foreword to *Pronunciation in the Classroom: The Overlooked Essential* published by *TESOL Press* in which she gives a brief overview of pronunciation teaching as well as focusing on certain problems that teaching pronunciation might entail. The whole book is a fascinating read with contributions from established researchers in the field of pronunciation.

Isaacs (2014) gives a brief historical review of pronunciation teaching. The importance of this article comes from the references included. It serves as a good starting point for further reading into the topic of pronunciation.

Daniel Jones' (1909) book *The Pronunciation of English* serves mostly to show how little pronunciation teaching, and the view of pronunciation teaching has changed in over one

hundred years. It is similar to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) and Kelly (2000) in as much as it gives an overview of the features and parts that pronunciation is made of.

Rodney Jones (1997) takes a closer look at the disparity between modern research of pronunciation and the teaching practices. He tries to give the reader a view into the state of teaching by contrasting the advancements made in research and the lack of advancements in applied teaching techniques.

Gerald Kelly (2000) offers an in depth view into teaching pronunciation. He indirectly offers the most complete definition of pronunciation as well as an overview into techniques, integrating pronunciation and speech into regular classes and much more.

Louis Kelly (1969) gives readers a fascinating view into the history of not just the teaching of pronunciation but of language teaching in general. This book is an invaluable resource for any researcher looking into practices of teaching the English language.

Helen Kendrick (1997) explores the effects of intensive talking exercises on speech and pronunciation pointing out the fact that teachers need to keep the students talking while still focusing on segments of speech in order to improve the learners' pronunciation.

Ketabi (2015) serves as a type of addendum to Louis Kelly's book. It explores the history of teaching up to 2015 and gives an invaluable insight into the trends that have started in the last few decades and into the state of pronunciation today.

Madrid and Hughes (2009) explore the assignments that helped learners to most improve their pronunciation and why those same learners have problem using those skills in the real world. This paper gives a view into the problems learners face when applying their knowledge outside of the classroom.

Mitra and others (2003) try a brand new approach to teaching and learning pronunciation. They explore the effects and possibilities when implementing voice recognition software into the classroom. They offer a different view of pronunciation in which teachers may not even be necessary, except to guide learners in their studies.

Morley (1991) focuses on the trends and renewed interest in pronunciation in the last decades of the last century focusing on the ones she feels will be of most importance in the following years.

Pennington and Richards (1986) show a sort of freeze frame of the state of pronunciation teaching and research in 1986 and how previous attitudes and approaches affected pronunciation teaching and the way researchers felt towards pronunciation in the eighties.

Walker (1999) has conducted a research entitled *Proclaimed and perceived wants and*

needs among Spanish teachers of English. The results of his research show that teachers and willing and ready to improve their pronunciation teaching but lack the skills, resources or confidence to do so.

Yule, Hoffman and Damico (1987) explore the importance of self-monitoring in second language acquisition and the impact it can make on learners' competence if they are properly instructed and guided by the teacher.

Relevant research in Croatia concerning the topic of pronunciation of the English language is at best sparse. One such relevant research is by Stanojević et al. (2013). They explore the attitudes learners have towards their accents, the accents of the people they are speaking to, and teaching models they are exposed to. With findings that serve as a kind of summation of papers previously mentioned in this paper. Showing the importance of varying exercises, immersion in real life situations and the possibility that we may have to change our whole way of teaching EFL in schools as well as universities.

2. Contemporary EFL Teaching Versus Incidental Learning in Pronunciation: research report

2.1. Aim

The aim of the research is to explore EFL learners' perception of the impact of contemporary EFL teaching versus incidental learning on correct pronunciation acquisition. The research questions addressed were:

1) Do participants feel that they have learned more about correct pronunciation in EFL classes or through exposure to the English language, and what are their attitudes towards EFL classes?
2) Is there a significant difference in test scores between participants who feel they have learned more in EFL classes and those who feel they have learned more through incidental learning?
3) Is there a relationship between the participants' test score and years spent studying English that supports their attitudes?

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Participants

The sample included 145 high school participants. The reason high school participants

were selected is because they come from different elementary schools thus forming a more varied sample. The sample consisted of 89 female participants and 56 male participants. The average age of participants is 16.8 (SD=1.1) with the youngest being 15 and the oldest being 18. The average grade in English at the end of the last school year is 4.4 (SD=.8). Their average time spent learning English was 8.58 years (SD=2.2) with the least amount of time being 4 years and the most being 13 years. According to their statements 118 participants (81.4%) preferred American English, and 27 participants (18.6%) preferred British English.

2.2.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used in the testing of the participants: a short text and a questionnaire. The short text (see Appendix 1) focused on phonemes such as the *th* in *there, the, thought*, etc., vowels in *coming, block,* and *branches*, and the different pronunciations in *the*, the *ch* sound in *Charlie, checked,* and *branches*, and lexical items such as *ought, bought, thought, coughed,* and *enough*, as well as the *r* sound in different words. There were sometimes multiple instances of the same phoneme and lexical item evaluated because participants would sometimes pronounce it incorrectly and sometimes, usually the second time, correctly.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) probed participants' age, gender, the age at which they started learning English, their final grade in English from the previous year, what type of pronunciation they think they use (American or British English), a multiple choice question on what they feel is the main area of focus in class, and where they feel they had learned more about correct pronunciation. The participants who answered that they feel they had learned more about correct pronunciation at home answered an additional question about what they feel was the main source of learning (films, video games, songs, etc.).

2.2.3. Procedure

The study was conducted at participants' school. Participants were first informed about the procedure and the fact that it was anonymous and voluntary. They were specifically informed about recording involved and were told that if it made them feel uncomfortable they could opt out of participating. They were then, one by one, taken to a separate room where the study was conducted. They were first given a code number which they were asked to later write down on the questionnaire. This was necessary to connect their recordings to their questionnaires and to keep the process completely anonymous. Then they read the short text which was recorded for later evaluation. Each reading took around 60 to 90 seconds. After

approximately twenty participants finished their recordings they were given the questionnaires to fill out. They were given the questionnaires after the recordings so that the information that their pronunciation was being evaluated would not influence their actual pronunciation. The questionnaire was administered to a group in order to avoid participants sharing information about the research. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants before administering the questionnaire.

Afterwards the recordings were repeatedly listened to and scored for accuracy concerning the aforementioned points by the researcher. Every item that was scored and that was pronounced correctly was worth one point up to a total of 41 points. That data, along with the data of the participants, was analysed using IBM SPSS.

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Participants' attitudes toward the composition of EFL classes

Table 1 presents participants' attitudes towards EFL classes. They were told to circle the area or areas which they felt were most focused on in class. Since they could all circle more than one answer two percentages were calculated: one refers to the percentage of participants who selected a particular answer (and could add up to over a 100 % and which is why the participant percentage should be viewed for each area separately), whereas the other refers to the percentage of responses (out of the total number of responses) selected by participants.

Table 1: EFL learners' view of class structure

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Percentage of participants
Grammar	68	43.9 %	47.2 %
Speaking	47	30.3 %	32.6 %
Writing	8	5.2 %	5.6 %
Vocabulary	32	20.6 %	22.2 %

The results show that participants feel that grammar is most focused on in class, with 68 responses and with almost half the participants choosing it, and accounting for 43.9 % of

responses. Participants feel that speaking is the second most focused on area, with 47 responses accounting for 32.6 % of the participants. This result may be attributed to participants considering any form of speaking to fall into this category. Vocabulary is in the third place with 32 responses or 22.2 %. And lastly, writing was selected 8 times (5.6 % responses).

2.3.2. Participants' attitudes towards the type of learning that most benefited their pronunciation

Table 2 presents participants' attitude towards the type of learning they perceive as most beneficial for their pronunciation.

Table 2: From where do the participants think they've learned more about correct pronunciation?

	Number of participants	Percentage
EFL classes	26	17.9 %
Incidental learning	119	82.1 %

From the table it is obvious that a vast majority of participants feel that they have learned more from incidental learning, it was chosen by 119 participants (82.1 %) whereas only 26 participants (17.9 %) chose EFL classes.

Table 3 shows the responses of the 119 participants who chose incidental learning as that which helped them most with correct pronunciation the most. This was an open ended question and participants could write anything down. Their responses were grouped into four categories for easier data management and clearer results. The four categories were: film (anything TV related, meaning actual films, TV shows, documentaries, etc.), songs, video games and the Internet (anything Internet related, meaning video calls, audio calls, YouTube videos, etc.).

Table 3: Main source for accurate pronunciation

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Percentage of participants
Film	93	47.7 %	78.2 %
Songs	50	25.6 %	42 %
Video games	42	21.5 %	35.3 %
Internet	10	5.1 %	8.4 %

This table also proved very interesting with 93 responses (47.7 %) for film accounting for 78.2 % of participants. In second place are songs with 50 responses (25.6 %) or 42 % of participants. Thirdly, video games with 42 responses (21.5 %) making up 35.3 % of participants. Lastly, there is the internet with 10 responses (5.1 %) or 8.4 % of participants.

2.3.3. Pronunciation accuracy results

Table 4 shows the results of the pronunciation accuracy test with a maximum of 41 points. It is divided into three parts, the first shows the result for all participants (N=145) l, the second shows the results for participants who felt that the learned more from EFL classes (n=26), and the third shows results for those participants who felt they learned more through incidental learning (n=119).

Table 4: Pronunciation test scores

	All participants N=145	EFL classes n=26	Incidental learning n=119
Mean	17.1	15.5	17.4
Median	17	16	17
Minimum	0	7	0
Maximum	39	23	39
Std. Deviation	5.22	3.91	5.42

Participants were given a short text to read aloud while being recorded. The text contained 41 points of interest which the participants were being evaluated on. The significance of the difference between the groups was tested using a Mann-Whitney U test which showed that there was no statistically significant difference between groups ($p = .069$).

As far as the results for all participants go, the mean score was 17.1, the lowest score was 0 points and the highest was 39 points out of a possible 41 points.

Participants who felt that they had learned more from EFL classes did worse than the group average scoring a mean of 15.5 points, with a minimum score of 7 points, and a maximum of 23 points out of a possible 41. The incidental learning group set both the minimum and maximum points for all participants with 0 and 39 respectively, but with a higher mean score of 17.4.

Lastly the correlation between years of learning and the test scores were analysed using Pearson correlation which showed that there was no statistically significant correlation ($p = .641$) between the two variables.

2.4. Discussion

By analyzing the answers from Table 1 to the question "Which areas do you think are most focused on in EFL?" we can see how the participants perceive EFL classes. Multiple answers per student were possible, so the total number of responses is higher than the total

number of participants. Also, in this segment percentages of responses will be reported in order to ease comparison between areas of EFL.

It can be concluded that participants feel that they are mostly taught grammar with 68 responses (43.9 % of responses), which is understandable as they are taught more new grammatical rules and structures each year, but it does paint a picture of how EFL teaching, and foreign language teaching, is perceived in general. It is viewed as explicitly learning rules and how to apply them, a situation that may not be that far off from the truth. This fact is substantialized by anecdotal evidence with a few different teachers whose classes were visited while the research was taking place, but as it is anecdotal it should not be taken as a fact until further research is made, because some grammatical structures are easier to teach, and easier for learners to grasp using explicit rule teaching.

The area that the participants feel is the second most focused on is speaking with 47 responses (30.3 % of responses). This is interesting because, as we have learned from the theoretical part, pronunciation is not in the forefront focus-wise. This may be due to the fact that learners do not realize that not all speaking is focused on developing communicational speaking skills, and because to them speaking is speaking no matter if they need to communicate in life-like situations or in decontextualized ones or if it is merely giving the answer to a task. This should be probed in follow-up studies on learners' attitudes in order to give a clearer picture on their views on EFL classes. Apart from that, the finding, if the assumption that learners do not differentiate between types of speaking is true, presents a problem, because it shows that learners are made to solve tasks and follow instruction without realizing the actual purpose of the given task. This in turn makes learners uninterested, demotivated, and jaded to tasks. They will solve them, but without trying to analyze the point of the task or the meaning behind it, which is basically making them do rote learning through tasks.

The third area is vocabulary with 32 responses (20.6 % of responses). This seems normal enough seeing as they are exposed to language for the duration of the class and new vocabulary items are bound to be encountered in every class because of the sheer need to communicate new things, but also because textbooks and classes are made in a way that they constantly enrich learners' vocabulary.

The last and most surprising area is writing with just eight responses (5.2 % of responses), because the learners are made to write more and more because of the washback of the *matura* exam. They write essays with more complex topics and structures each year with a

strong focus on discussion, argumentation, and writing style in general. This disparity between responses of writing and speaking, the former being strongly focused on, and the latter being barely focused on, may be due to the fact that learners understand that writing down answers to a task, or writing down notes in class are not made to improve their writing skills or accuracy. This in turn can be explained by exposure to writing they have had throughout their years of study, where they have had plenty of different tasks and are able to differentiate between purposes. Other reasons may be that they are more comfortable with writing as opposed to speaking and thus it doesn't make much of an impression on them.

All in all, these findings show a few important things. Firstly, the learners feel that their classes are saturated with grammar which corresponds with the public image of EFL classes. This may be due to the fact that grammar is explicitly taught and that formula of *"rule into examples into tasks into creation"* is repeated over and over again which may be rectified by more integrated grammar tasks which make the learners understand rather than remember and reproduce. Secondly, learners seem to differentiate between types of writing tasks, or maybe they are comfortable with writing tasks, or both factors combined which is why the writing tasks they carry out do not leave that much of an impression on the learners. And thirdly, they feel that speaking is focused on in EFL classes. There is multitude of reasons that might explain why they feel that way. First of all, the answer might be really simple: they actually focus a lot on speaking in their EFL classes. Second of all, they might not differentiate between the types of speaking in class, and might see giving answers to tasks as a speaking exercise. This, as previously stated, is a problem because it means that the learners do not have enough understanding on how speaking tasks work. Third of all, they might feel more stressed or otherwise uncomfortable when performing speaking tasks and that is why those tasks linger in their minds for longer and have a stronger impression on them. One of the biggest fears people have is public speaking, and teachers should create a positive environment for learners where they feel they are free to make mistakes, not because those mistakes will go unnoticed, but because they will learn through mistakes. Also, if learners do not have a mental block when speaking they will, in turn, speak more which will improve their communicational and pronunciation skills. This is a conclusion that Kendrick came to in her paper *Keep Them Talking!* (1997).

The analysis of the results in Table 2 shows a disparity between the number of learners who feel they had learned more in EFL classes and those who feel they have learned more through incidental learning. Tests results will be analyzed later in the paper because it is

important to focus purely on learners' attitudes in this part. That being said, even if there is no statistical difference between the two groups of learners in test scores the sheer number of learners that feel that they had learned more through incidental learning is worrisome. It means that learners feel that teachers are not teaching them correct pronunciation, or at least that a large number of them feels that way. Learners cannot be expected to be motivated to learn if they feel that teachers are not teaching them anything.

This result can mean a few different things. Firstly, some participants may feel they had learned all they need to know about pronunciation before they even started EFL lessons. This conclusion, while possible, is highly improbable to the point of dismissal. Secondly, the learners who feel they have learned more through incidental learning do not realize the impact that pronunciation teaching in EFL classes has had on them. This scenario is more probable, but learners usually feel when they are learning something. Thirdly, teachers are not teaching pronunciation. This scenario is possible because teaching pronunciation with the methods and techniques that most teachers are aware of is slow and hard work which is why teacher mostly stick to light error correction or they value fluency more than accuracy. Teachers feeling that teaching pronunciation is impossible or a waste of time is another possible reason for the third scenario. And lastly, the learners feel they are not being taught pronunciation because of their inability to differentiate between tasks. They may feel that most of the 'pronunciation' tasks they encounter are not serving to better their pronunciation while the task is simply to construct an imperative sentence and is thus primarily grammatical.

Analysis of the results in Table 3 is a continuation of the last table. Learners who answered that they feel they have learned more through incidental learning were probed for a more specific source of their perceived pronunciation knowledge. As with Table 1, multiple answers were possible so the total number of responses is higher than the total number of learners, and, again as with Table 1, percentages of responses will be reported for easier comparison. As was explained before this question was open to any response the learners felt was correct for them, that is why their answers were grouped into four categories: film (actual films, TV shows, documentaries, etc.), songs, video games, and the internet (voice calls, video calls, YouTube videos, etc.). One should keep in mind these categories when considering the next part.

The most popular category was film with 93 responses (47.7 % of responses). This is quite understandable and self-explanatory. Even though children today watch less television than ever before, they watch more films and TV series than ever before because of the

possibility to watch what they want, when they want. Streaming services like Netflix, HBO or Hulu have created a new effect called ‘binge watching’ or ‘binging’ for short, which is when a person watches consecutive episodes of a TV series or show for extended periods of time. This phenomenon has essentially brought more exposure to English to younger generations than conventional television ever has, and could prove very useful in the years to come. If not as tools for teachers, then as a source for incidental learning for learners in all aspects of the language. The second most popular category was songs with 50 responses (25.6 % of responses). Songs have been proven as a useful tool for correct pronunciation not just in English, with people losing their accents when singing, but as a rectifier of speech impediments. Songs could prove a valuable tool for incidental learning, but their effect on some of the subtler forms of pronunciation is yet to be determined. The third most popular category was video games with 42 responses (21.5 % of responses). The participants who chose this category were mostly male, with only 6 female participants choosing this category. This number is reasonable seeing as, statistically, males predominantly play video games as opposed to females. Video games could prove to be very good for incidental learning because players usually listen to pre-recorded dialogue made for the game or communicate with other players with most interactions between players are on English seeing as it is the *lingua franca.* These situations vary and could necessitate fast and accurate verbal responses from the player forcing them to be precise with their pronunciation so they can be more easily understood. The other advantage of video games is that they have a built-in reward/punishment system which makes the players strive to be better, and getting better at team-based games means getting better at communicating to your teammates, and getting better at vocalizing your wants and needs. As far as pre-recorded dialogues go, the player needs to be able to understand in order to play the game so, in turn, listens intently to dialogue recorded by professional voice actors with emotion, intent, and clarity. This exposes players to input in a large variety of situations, and is directly contrasted to dialogue found on textbook CDs where the voice actors usually talk in a fake, unenthusiastic, and monotone voice with unusual and unnatural inflections about situations where the learner can already predict what is going on and has no real interest. The least picked category was the Internet with only 10 responses (5.1 % of responses). This is intriguing because it is the general attitude that adolescents and teenagers use the Internet either a lot or too much, depending on who you’re asking. Because of that it seems odd that they did not choose it more. One of the possible reasons is that they are not using it for things that may improve their pronunciation i.e. watching videos or communicating through voice or video calls on English, which means they

use it for text-based communication or activities that do not use the English spoken language. The second is that they do not pay attention. This is very probable, because learners do not want to focus on somebody's pronunciation of the *schwa* vowel while watching videos. This is where teachers come in, because they are the ones who should raise awareness with learners about the importance of pronunciation and encourage them to work on it. Learners should feel enthusiastic about noticing the difference in vowels or when they notice their favorite youtuber pronouncing *thought* differently than them, and then using those observations to work on their own pronunciation.

As seen in the test results there was no significant difference between the scores of the two groups of participants. One reason for this could be that student perception does not influence their motivation and so both groups results end up the same. The second reason could be that teachers pay little attention to pronunciation which leads to both groups being the same. Whichever the reason may be the most crucial information given by this analysis is the fact that both groups have low scores. This is very indicative of all the things that were talked about in the theoretical chapter on attitudes. As far as detailed analysis goes, it was noticed that students had problems not just with accurate phoneme pronunciation but also with lexical units. There were four units that were most commonly mispronounced with *charming* frequently being pronounced as /ʃɑːrmɪŋ/ or the /tʃ/ was too strong and very stereotypically Croatian. The other three units mispronounced to the point where students did not even recognize the word were *coughed*, *nearby*, and *apocalypse*, the last of which was not part of the scoring. The fact that students constantly mispronounced *charming* and were, for the most part, unfamiliar with *coughed* is alarming. This means that there was little or none error correction in their classes as far as *charming* goes because it is an easy error to rectify and requires minimal effort on the teacher's part. The situation with *coughed* is more dire, with 4th grade grammar school students learning English for multiple years now, who do not recognize the word *coughed*, and only 28 of the 145 pronouncing it correctly. They would pronounce *coughed* in amazingly different ways, e.g. /kɒtʃɛd/. This points to them not revising vocabulary elements in class or not learning the word at all, which seems absurd. Also problematic were the vowels in words like *coming, block,* and *worst*. The students frequently made mistakes by pronouncing all the *o* vowels as /ˈkɔmɪŋ/ and not as /ˈkʌmɪŋ/. As with *charming* this error is easy to rectify for teachers, or at least point out to the students mispronouncing it. It does not take away a lot of time from the class to point those mistakes out. The hard part is making the student feel like the teacher is helping him or her become a better speaker, and is not calling them out. Things teachers say in

their defense with cases like this is that error correction does not work, and that if they corrected everyone they would not have enough time. What they fail to realize is that correcting one learner also points out those mistakes to other learners who might be making the same one. Admittedly, there is a large variety of mistakes learners can make and it might seem like a daunting task to try and address every single one, but if a teacher addresses them as they come up it can be very helpful and useful in the long run without taking away a chunk of the class but rather small segments of a minute or two at a time. The minute or two should not be a problem if a teacher prepares for the class properly, leaving extra time at the end of the class, or redistribute the allotted time on the spot as they see fit by prioritizing certain segments and deprioritizing others. The problem with that is what was talked about in the theoretical part: teachers do not see pronunciation as important or beneficial to the learners. The /r/ sound was often trilled in a stereotypically Slavic way. Also, they would often pronounce the silent *e* at the end of regular past simple forms of verbs, meaning that they do not differentiate between phonetically consistent languages like Croatian and phonetically non-consistent languages like English when it comes to reading i.e. pronouncing it. The most interesting is the case of /ð/ and /θ/. The learners have huge problems with the voiced dental fricative (eth, ð), seeing as only one learner out of 145 successfully pronounced eth throughout the text. The voiceless dental fricative (theta, θ) was less of a problem but was still extremely inconsistent across the sample. Learners would usually replace eth and theta with /d/ and /t/ respectively. That approximation probably started when they were told that they can just say /d/ instead of /ð/ in order not to 'overburden' younger learners with pronunciation, or they were never told anything and just made their own rules. The interesting thing about /θ/ is that learners rarely used it when pronouncing *thought* but almost always used it when pronouncing *mouth* or, to a lesser extent, *thinking.* This makes little sense. It is obvious that learners are capable of differentiating the sounds because they are able and use the correct sound in the correct place, with some students overcompensating and using it in the wrong places, for example in *tried*. It is hard to pin down the cause of this inconsistency but unawareness or long-lasting errors could explain it or the fact that in some cases the sound rings so false in their ears that it is obvious that they must use the /θ/ sound instead of /t/, for example in *mouth.*

This all seems a bit hopeless, but there is a bright side: learners used logic, past experience, and knowledge to at least try and pronounce *coughed* and other words they seemed unfamiliar with. Some pronounced it /kɔːt/ which is probably a result of linking the *-ough* in *coughed* with the *-ough* in *ought* or *bought*. They also used similar techniques with *nearby*, as

previously stated. That means that they keep the rules of pronunciation in mind when encountering new words, and try to implement them, with more or less success. The important part is that they are aware of the rules that were taught to them. That means that pronunciation can be taught, even if it is at that basic, explicit level. That plus the fact that they can differentiate between /θ/ and /t/ means that with proper instruction they can implement it, and that they can strongly benefit from being taught pronunciation. It also shows a second thing, that learners are aware of their pronunciation, and are trying to improve it themselves using their own tactics and strategies. This is not only important because it indicates that learners are capable of that feat but that they care about pronunciation, because if they did not they would not try to improve it. There were some cases where learners simply skipped a word when they did not know it, but the vast majority at least tried.

Lastly, the correlation of learners' time spent learning English and their test scores has been tested using Pearson correlation which pointed out that there is no statistically significant correlation between the two variables (p=.641). This seems as an important finding because it shows that learners' pronunciation does not get better the more they study English, and that points to one thing: they are not being taught pronunciation. This might also explain why there was no difference in test scores between the two groups, because they all learned about pronunciation mostly incidentally or have remained on the same level of pronunciation proficiency since primary school which confirms what was stated by Gilakjani (2011) when he talked about the stagnation after basic pronunciation has been taught.

2.5. Conclusion

This research has shown that learners mostly feel that they have learned more about correct pronunciation through incidental learning than from EFL classes for which they feel are focused primarily on grammar, speaking, vocabulary, and writing in that order. There was no found significant statistical difference between the test scores of those students who felt they have learned more through incidental learning, and those who felt they have learned more in EFL classes. Even though no difference was found, the fact that their test results are below average with a mean of 17.1 out of a possible 41 shows that something is wrong, and judging from the theoretical part and past research it could be the teachers' attitude towards teaching pronunciation. To further test the impact of EFL classes on learners' pronunciation a correlation test was made between the amount of time learners had spent learning English and their test scores. There was no statistically significant correlation, meaning that learners who have been

learning English for longer are not statistically better at pronunciation than those who have been learning it for a smaller amount of time. This shows that they are not learning enough at EFL classes in order for them to advance their pronunciation skills, and that either they know what they know about pronunciation from incidental learning or that they know it from primary school EFL lessons which proves what was stated by Gilakjani (2011) about stagnation after a basic proficiency in pronunciation is acquired.

It has also presented a cross section of issues surrounding pronunciation teaching and acquisition, the attitudes surrounding it, and problems researchers face when researching it with the main issues being:

- general disinterest in pronunciation
- the attitude that pronunciation cannot be taught
- the attitude that pronunciation teaching is useless because it is not important
- the old-fashioned methods that are present when a teacher actually does decide to teach pronunciation, and the fear that teachers have when teaching it
- an inadequate fund of research papers on the topic
- difficult to change opinion on pronunciation and implement newfound methods

The last issue further propagates the first issue and the circle continues. While teaching pronunciation can be difficult, and implementing new methods even more so there is a way if teachers are willing. Teachers need to remember that they do not have to sacrifice time from other areas to give to pronunciation but can instead teach through integration making tasks more meaningful. They need to remember that they do not have to explicitly teach learners pronunciation but can instead give them guidance and point them to things that can help them externally. When performing speaking tasks, they need to create a positive atmosphere where it is allowed to fail and make mistakes as long as learners learn from them, and are aware of them either through self-monitoring or through the teacher's error correction. Because, in the end, they want to learn and they want to be able to speak fluently and pronounce correctly.

There is a possibly bright future awaiting pronunciation but what is needed for it is both changing the attitude of researchers and teachers towards it as well as discovering new methods and techniques to serve as proof that pronunciation is not impossible or hard to teach.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: short text

Charlie's Mistake

Charlie looked up at the sky and thought to himself: "It's the end of the world as we know it." Maybe he ought to have checked the forecast because it said that there was a storm coming, and not the end of the world. He rushed off to the charming little store down the block and bought what he needed for the coming apocalypse. Suddenly the storm blew in and it was rough. Even though he prepared for the worst, this was more than he could handle. He coughed as the wind blew in his face. He tried covering up his nose and mouth. It helped a bit but not enough so he tried to hide under the low branches of a nearby tree and started thinking about what to do. As he sat there the wind suddenly stopped and the sun rose. A passerby laid his hand on Charlie's shoulder and said: "That was one hell of a storm, huh?"

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

What Effect Does Contemporary EFL Teaching Have on Correct Pronunciation and How Does it Compare to Incidental Learning?

Age: _____

Gender: M F

At what age did you start learning English:_____

Final grade in English from last year: _____

What type of pronunciation do you think you use (circle the number):

1. American English 2. British English

In your opinion, what has been the main area of focus, or at least one of the more pronounced areas, throughout your English classes (circle the number):

1. Grammar 2. Speaking

3. Writing 4. Vocabulary

Where you feel you learnt more about correct pronunciation (circle the number):

1. At school 2. At home (from films, video games, songs, etc.)

If you feel you learnt more about correct pronunciation at home, then what do you feel was your main source for learning correct pronunciation (films, video games, songs, etc.):

_____