

Exploring Pronunciation Teaching: A Case Study of Practices and Perceptions in an English Classroom

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Despite its direct impact on intelligibility and fluency, pronunciation frequently receives minimal attention in English language classrooms. This study explores the current state of pronunciation teaching in a selected English bilingual class at a Slovak high school. It specifically investigates how a confident English language teacher handles pronunciation instruction regarding its extent, content, integration, models, materials, and techniques. Additionally, it examines the attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and reflections of both the participating teacher and students. A qualitative case study approach integrated data from three research methods: observations, a teacher interview, and a focus group interview. These data were triangulated to achieve in-depth understanding of the situation. While findings from a small-scale case study are not generalisable, they can offer valuable insights in similar contexts in English language pronunciation instruction. While the teacher confidently incorporated pronunciation, their approach had significant weaknesses: largely intuitive, unsystematic, and decontextualized tasks. This repetitive practice reduced effectiveness and lacked productive engagement. Both teacher and learners did not critically reflect on these shortcomings, highlighting a crucial need to raise awareness and address L1 interference. The findings suggest that a more focused methodological teacher training can substantially improve pronunciation instruction in similar contexts.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Pronunciation Teaching, Bilingual Education, Teacher Perceptions

Introduction

Pronunciation is an important component of language learning, directly influencing learners' intelligibility and fluency in communication. Despite this importance, current research consistently indicates that pronunciation teaching often receives no or only limited attention in English language classrooms (Scrivener, 2011; Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010), whether resulting from prioritising other language aspects in the restricted classroom time, the teachers' view of pronunciation practice as unnecessary, or their uncertainty of how to integrate pronunciation in language lessons effectively (Griffiths, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; Datko, 2013; Harmer, 2007). This attitude, however, has a large impact on learners' ability to communicate effectively: considering that the differences in sound inventories and prosody between various languages can be rather broad, the acquisition of accurate and

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intelligible pronunciation of a foreign language can be a challenging task. Therefore, a systematic approach to pronunciation practice and proper guidance from teachers is needed in this process. Recognising the above-stated gap in this area, this study aims to explore the state of pronunciation teaching in a selected English bilingual class at a Slovak high school, including its extent, content, integration, models, materials and techniques. Simultaneously, its goal is to understand the attitudes, perceptions, motivations and reflections of the selected teacher and learners on the examined pronunciation instruction. By employing a qualitative case study design with triangulated methods — observations, a teacher interview, and a focus group interview, it provides a more complex view of the reality and challenges of pronunciation instruction in the described context. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on effective pronunciation teaching, drawing pedagogical recommendations based on the identified weaknesses that can support the development of more effective and engaging pronunciation instruction.

Literature Review

Pronunciation Teaching: Shifting from Native-like Accents to Intelligibility

Over the past 70 years, English has evolved from being a foreign language to becoming a global language, playing a significant role in nearly every country worldwide. Today, English primarily facilitates communication between individuals with different mother tongues rather than serving as a medium between native speakers (Crystal, 2003).

This unique position and function of English have also influenced the perception of pronunciation teaching goals. In the context of English as an international language, the importance of native accents in cross-cultural communication has diminished significantly, as noted by Brown (2001). The rapid global spread of English has led to a shift in the objectives of pronunciation teaching, moving away from achieving native-like accents and toward ensuring intelligibility. This approach aims to help learners surpass the "threshold level" at which their pronunciation no longer hinders effective communication (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Moreover, achieving a native-like accent is an unrealistic goal for most adult learners. Research suggests that only a small number of exceptionally talented and highly motivated individuals can attain such proficiency (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). In today's multilingual and multicultural world, accents are widely accepted, further emphasizing that "native-speakerism" is both an unrealistic and irrelevant objective.

It is important to highlight that "if intelligibility is the goal, then it suggests that some pronunciation features are more important than others" (Harmer, 2007, p. 249). Research conducted by Jennifer Jenkins (2001) identifies specific pronunciation features essential for intelligibility in interlanguage communication between non-native speakers, a concept known as the "Lingua Franca Core." For example, features such as vowel length, aspiration after fortis plosives, and nuclear stress are critical for ensuring intelligibility. In contrast, other features, such as assimilations

or intonation, carry less importance and may require less instructional focus compared to the core features.

Teaching English Pronunciation in the Slovak Context

In the context of English language education in Slovakia, pronunciation teaching should focus on areas impacted by language interference, which often leads to negative transfer. By addressing these specific challenges, teachers can help learners improve their pronunciation and enhance overall communication effectiveness. This section outlines key problem areas and provides guidance for teaching pronunciation in upper secondary education, supported by relevant research and sources.

Acquiring a second language requires learners to master the sounds of the target language, which may be new, similar, or identical to their native phonemes. English and Slovak have similar numbers of phonemes (44 and 42, respectively), but significant differences in articulation quality often lead to substitutions that reduce comprehensibility (Vančová, 2016). According to Roach (2009), articulation differences are a decisive factor in language interference, causing Slovak learners to replace English phonemes with the closest Slovak equivalents.

Additionally, Slovak learners face challenges with English's less predictable relationship between spelling and pronunciation. For instance, the English phoneme /k/ has multiple representations ("ck" in *duck*, "k" in *kitchen*, and "c" in *cat*), while the grapheme "a" can correspond to nine distinct phonemes (/æ/ in *cat*, /eɪ/ in *cake*, /ə/ in *sofa*, /ɑ:/ in *father*, /e/ in *any*, /ɔ:/ in *water*, /ɒ/ in *swap*, /ɪ/ in *village*, silent letter in *marriage*). This unpredictability of spelling and pronunciation can cause confusion, particularly at the beginning of language learning.

Pedagogical recommendations emphasize raising awareness of these differences and practising problematic sounds. Based on research (Vančová, 2016; Metruk, 2019), priority should be given to:

- *Schwa vowel* (/ə/): often substituted with full vowels resembling written letters.
- *e-sounds* (/e/, /æ/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /eə/): frequently replaced by Slovak vowels /e/, /e:/, or /er/.
- *Vowel length*: misinterpreted before fortis and lenis consonants, as Slovak vowel length is unaffected by neighbouring consonants.
- *Dentals* (/ð/, /θ/): substituted with Slovak /t/, /d/, /f/, /s/, or /z/.
- *Aspirated plosives* (/p/, /t/, /k/): produced with excessive or insufficient aspiration.
- *Non-rhotic "r"* (/r/): Realized as an alveolar tap, resembling Slovak "r".
- *-ng cluster* (/ŋ/): Often pronounced as /ng/ instead of /ŋ/.
- *Sound distinctions* (/w/ vs. /v/, /n/ vs. /ŋ/): frequently confused, affecting meaning.

Suprasegmentals, including stress, rhythm, and intonation, are vital for effective communication, as they provide meaning and emotional nuance to speech (Derwing

& Munro, 2009). Mistakes in suprasegmentals are often more disruptive than errors in segmental features (Bázklik & Miškovičová, 2012). Key challenges for Slovak learners include (Sabol & Zimmerman, 1994; Král', 2009; Mistrík et al., 1993; Sičáková, 2002):

- *Stress placement*: Slovak's fixed first-syllable stress contrasts with English's variable stress patterns, leading to errors in syllable quantity and vowel pronunciation.
- *Stress-timed rhythm*: Slovak learners often fail to differentiate sufficiently between stressed and unstressed syllables, resulting in monotonous delivery that disrupts English rhythm.
- *Fluency*: Slovak's rhythmic pattern, characterized by clearly separated words, conflicts with English's connected speech.
- *Assimilation patterns*: Slovak learners tend to transfer Slovak assimilation rules to English, such as incorrectly devoicing final consonants and altering grammatical endings.
- *Distinctive intonation*: Slovak learners struggle with English's broader pitch range and melodic transitions, often resulting in flat, monotonous intonation.

Teaching suprasegmentals should focus on raising awareness of stress patterns, improving rhythm through stress-timed practice, and addressing intonation to enhance learners' naturalness and communicative clarity in English.

Effective pronunciation teaching in the Slovak context requires targeted instruction addressing both segmental and suprasegmental challenges. By prioritizing features that impact intelligibility, such as schwa vowels, stress placement, and connected speech, teachers can help learners achieve clearer, more effective communication. Incorporating these insights into practice will ensure better alignment with the communicative demands of English in real-world contexts.

Recommended Pronunciation teaching Materials

When selecting materials for language teaching, teachers must consider factors such as learners' age, proficiency level, background knowledge, and comprehensibility of the materials (Reid, 2014). Pronunciation teaching typically uses two types of materials: authentic and adapted.

Authentic materials are texts or recordings created for native speakers rather than language learners (Harmer, 2007). These offer several advantages, including:

- exposing learners to natural language;
- making interactions meaningful and realistic;
- providing cultural context;
- suitability for various proficiency levels;
- offering engaging, up-to-date content.

Despite challenges like complex language or preparation demands, authentic materials are valuable for pronunciation teaching. Examples include songs (useful

for stress, intonation, and connected speech), podcasts, TV shows, radio programs, public speeches, and real-life conversations (Holden & Nobre, 2019).

Adapted materials are resources modified to meet learners' specific needs by simplifying language, adding support, or adjusting content. They are convenient, "ready-made," and versatile for any age or proficiency level. However, they can lack authenticity and meaningful language. Effective adapted materials for pronunciation teaching include handouts targeting specific features, explanatory videos, dictation texts, pronunciation apps, interactive quizzes, and coursebook recordings.

Key Pronunciation teaching Techniques

When teaching pronunciation, the choice of technique is crucial as it significantly impacts learners' acquisition of the target's language pronunciation. A well-chosen technique can enhance learning by ensuring clear mediation, increasing student motivation, and creating a supportive environment that fosters accurate pronunciation and confidence (Brown, 2001). According to Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), there are two primary approaches to pronunciation teaching: the intuitive-imitative approach, which relies on learners imitating sounds and rhythms from models, and the analytic-linguistic approach, which uses tools like the phonetic alphabet and contrastive information to explicitly inform learners. These approaches complement each other, with the analytic-linguistic approach providing additional resources to enhance pronunciation skills. Pronunciation teaching can also be approached from either a top-down or bottom-up perspective. The top-down approach emphasizes larger language units like suprasegmentals, while the bottom-up approach focuses on smaller segments like individual sounds (AMEP, 2002). There is now a shift toward a balanced approach that integrates both levels, emphasizing pronunciation in the context of regular language lessons.

Below are common pronunciation teaching techniques (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Alhassan, 2023; Reid, 2016; AMEP, 2002; Brewster et al., 1992; Mardiani & Hanifah, 2023) that can be used in English lessons, along with comments on their benefits, disadvantages, and suitability for our target age and proficiency group (16 years old learners, B2 level):

- *Listening and Repeating*: this traditional method involves learners imitating a model provided by the teacher. It is simple to use and can be integrated at any point in the lesson, even without specialized materials. Adding audio or video resources enhances engagement and provides diverse models. This technique is suitable for learners of all age groups.
- *Drilling*: drilling provides valuable practice, particularly for new language learners, but it can be repetitive and disengaging for older students. To maintain engagement, drills should incorporate both segmental and suprasegmental features and be varied, including repetition drills, minimal pair drills, substitution drills, transformation drills, chain drills, tongue twisters, and chants.

- *Ear Training*: focused on improving the ability to perceive sounds, ear training helps learners recognize and produce accurate pronunciation. Though better suited for younger learners, it remains valuable for all age groups. Aspects of connected speech (assimilation, elision, weak forms) are suitable for more advanced students.
- *Tongue Twisters*: are fun and effective for teaching challenging sounds and prosodic features, beneficial for both younger and older learners.
- *Songs and Rhymes*: Their rhythmic nature helps learners with pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. While ideal for younger learners, older students may enjoy these activities if presented in a non-embarrassing way.
- *Drama*: dramatizing helps learners with both segmental and suprasegmental aspects, especially with rhythm and intonation. It is suitable for all age groups.
- *Reading Aloud/Recitation*: this technique allows teachers to identify pronunciation errors promptly. It is effective for older learners with strong reading skills and can target specific pronunciation features.
- *Recordings*: Recording allows learners to self-assess their pronunciation, making it particularly useful for more advanced learners. Feedback from teachers or peers further enhances the learning process.
- *Visual Aids*: Tools like sound-colour charts and phonemic symbols help learners understand how sounds are produced, especially beneficial for advanced learners.
- *Use of technology*: can be a useful tool for learning pronunciation. Many applications and websites are available for listening, repeating, recording pronunciation, and even correcting mistakes.
- *Explicit Learning*: provides learners with theoretical knowledge of sound production and suprasegmentals enhances their ability to understand and apply pronunciation rules, particularly useful for advanced learners.
- *Phonics*: Primarily used with younger learners, phonics helps establish the connection between sounds and letters, aiding reading skills and pronunciation.
- *Phonetic Training*: This technique teaches learners the articulatory process and phonetic symbols, offering deep insight into pronunciation. It is especially helpful for adult learners who struggle with hearing or imitating sounds.

Combining these techniques with contextually integrated activities helps ensure effective and engaging pronunciation instruction for learners of varying age groups and proficiency levels and overall language competence.

Phonological Competence in teaching English as a Foreign Language

Teaching a foreign language is a complex task, encompassing a wide range of competences, each contributing to building overall language proficiency. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020), phonological competence is one of the linguistic competences, alongside grammatical, lexical, and orthographic competences. Linguistic competence, in turn,

is one of the three communicative language competences, alongside sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.

Our research examines the state of pronunciation teaching in English language lessons at the upper secondary level, specifically within a five-year bilingual program at a high school. According to the national curriculum, the *Maturita* exam (equivalent to the A-level) is expected to be at the C1 level (NIVAM, 2015). However, the observed students were at the B2 level (second year), so our study focuses on the theory of phonological competence as defined for B2 learners.

The CEFR (2020) describes the overall phonological control of B2 students as being generally accurate in using appropriate intonation, correctly placing stress, and articulating individual sounds clearly. While their accents are often influenced by other languages, this typically has little to no effect on intelligibility. Specifically, in terms of sound articulation, B2 learners can produce most target language sounds clearly during extended speech, remaining intelligible despite occasional systematic mispronunciations. Regarding prosodic features, they can employ stress, intonation, and rhythm effectively to convey their intended message, although some influence from other languages may persist.

Despite their relatively high level of English pronunciation, certain issues remain, particularly in the problematic areas identified for Slovak learners. Addressing these issues can further enhance their phonological competence and overall communicative ability.

Methods

A Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Research frequently reports that pronunciation teaching is often neglected or delivered in a disorganised manner lacking a clear focus on addressing problematic features (Scrivener, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010; Vančová, 2020; Reid & Debnarova, 2023). This research study selects a teacher who regularly includes pronunciation instruction and is confident in their pronunciation teaching to qualitatively investigate how pronunciation is taught in their lesson.

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the state of pronunciation teaching in a selected English bilingual class. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how pronunciation teaching is perceived and implemented by an experienced and confident English language teacher, the content they prioritize, and the teaching techniques and materials they employ during their pronunciation teaching.

Research Questions

1. How is English pronunciation instruction in a selected English bilingual programme class?
2. How does the chosen English language teacher perceive and integrate pronunciation teaching into their English language lessons?
3. How do students in an English bilingual programme perceive pronunciation learning during their English language lessons?

Instruments and Procedure

A case study was chosen for this research, as the focus is on understanding how pronunciation teaching is perceived and practised in English language lessons. Case studies provide an in-depth examination of real people in real situations, enabling readers to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of the issues being investigated.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the case, multiple research methods were employed. These methods collected data from real-life contexts and generated detailed, descriptive reports. Triangulation was used to compare data from different sources to confirm or challenge the findings (Robson, 2011). The outcomes of case studies can contribute to individual development, provide valuable feedback, support evaluations, and inform educational policymakers. However, researchers must acknowledge the limitations of case studies, including the lack of generalizability, and challenges in making comparisons due to selective, personal, and potentially subjective data.

This case study served as an umbrella framework, combining data from several research methods: observation, an individual interview, and a focus group interview (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007, Flick 2010).

Semi-structured observation sheet was developed, with categories and codes derived from the collected data. These included the contents, materials, and teaching techniques used for pronunciation instruction, as well as how pronunciation was integrated into observed English language lessons. Observations were conducted over two months in a high school offering an English bilingual programme in Slovakia.

Semi-structured interview was conducted with the observed English language teacher to explore their perception and integration of pronunciation teaching. The interview examined their attitudes towards the importance of pronunciation instruction, the content she focused on, the materials and teaching techniques she used, and the pronunciation model she employed. It also included their self-reflection on their pronunciation and methodological preparedness.

Focus group was conducted with 16 observed students (aged 16, in their second year of study) after the observations were completed. Focus groups are particularly valuable in qualitative research, as they foster dynamic discussions, allowing participants to complement one another's points, resulting in more diverse responses and a more complete and reliable account of the examined reality (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). The focus group aimed to gather authentic insights into the presence and extent of pronunciation teaching, the content covered, the materials

and models used, and the teaching techniques applied during their English language lessons (not only the observed ones).

All collected data were analysed using descriptive narrative methods and coding. All collected data were coded independently by two researchers to enhance the validity of findings. To strengthen both reliability and validity, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing data obtained through different research methods (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007; Flick 2010).

Participants and Ethics

Purposive sampling was employed in this case study. As it was mentioned earlier, pronunciation instruction tends to be overlooked or approached inconsistently. For this reason, we selected a teacher who is aware of this issue and confident in their pronunciation teaching. The chosen teacher has more than 17 years of teaching experience at the selected school. The rationale for selecting an experienced and confident teacher was to qualitatively explore how she teaches pronunciation, including their focus on segmental and suprasegmental aspects, the teaching techniques and materials she uses, and how she integrates pronunciation instruction into their lessons. The observed teacher was informed about the focus of our research, though only in relation to the broader topic of pronunciation teaching. The class of 16 students in their second year of a bilingual program at a high school (B2 level) was selected by the observed teacher and participated in a focus group interview.

The observed teacher participated voluntarily in the research and provided written informed consent. The school principal also signed the informed consent form, confirming their understanding of the research purpose and procedures. Students and their legal guardians were fully informed about the aims and process of the research and provided written consent prior to participation. They were clearly briefed on their roles in the observations and interviews, and were assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality. The collected data were handled in a way that ensured no public identification of the school or participants. All research procedures complied with the ethical standards of the researchers' university and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declarations of Helsinki.

Results

The following section provides the analysis of the observed lessons taught by the teacher, followed by the analysis of data gathered from an individual interview with their and from the focus-group interview with the learners of the observed group. For better orientation in the data, the categories and corresponding codes are presented in tables after being summarised and analysed in text.

Observation Analysis

Pronunciation teaching was present in all observed lessons, though its scope and depth varied considerably. The instruction focused predominantly on segmental features, such as vocabulary with unique and unpredictable pronunciation (e.g., city names like *Gloucester*, *Leister*), irregular verb forms (e.g. *read* in present vs. past simple), homonyms (e.g. *Wait a minute!* Vs. *They found minute particles of dust in the air*), and words with silent letters (e.g. *I wrapped the wreath in the wrong paper*). These features were typically highlighted in order to draw learners' attention to irregularities in English orthography – phonology correspondence. However, the treatment of suprasegmental aspects was noticeably minimal, restricted to occasional references to lexical stress related to affixation and word class. This imbalance between segmental and suprasegmental instruction reflects a missed pedagogical opportunity. While segmental features are fundamental, suprasegmental features, such as rhythm, weak and strong forms, and sentence stress, play an equally crucial role in developing learners' intelligibility and communicative competence. At the proficiency level of the observed learners, systematic practice of both levels of pronunciation would have been appropriate and beneficial, yet suprasegmentals received only marginal attention.

While the focus on unpredictable pronunciation of phonemes was generally appropriate, instruction tended to be superficial and decontextualized. Features were presented in isolation rather than as part of meaningful communicative practice. For instance, vocabulary items were often chosen randomly, selected primarily to exemplify phonological irregularities rather than to support communicative goals. Dictation activities illustrating silent letters or drills on irregular verb forms, while useful for raising awareness, remained disconnected from authentic usage and therefore limited in their pedagogical impact. Learners became aware of irregularities but were rarely provided with opportunities to internalize or practice these features in speech, dialogues, or interaction activities. As a result, the potential of pronunciation instruction to contribute to long term improvement in fluency and intelligibility was only partially realized.

The teacher relied heavily on adapted materials, most notably handouts designed to target specific pronunciation aspects (e.g. word stress marking or transcription decoding). The lack of thematic coherence and meaningful communicative context in these materials significantly reduced their relevance and applicability beyond the classroom exercises themselves. Bilingual/translation dictionaries (both online and printed), considered semi-authentic materials, also played an important role, particularly in supporting learner autonomy. However, reliance on bilingual dictionaries limited learners' exposure to authentic pronunciation models. The use of monolingual dictionaries would be more advisable, as they typically provide pronunciation in both British and American English, along with accurate phonemic transcriptions and audio recordings. These tools enabled learners to analyse pronunciation features, decode transcriptions, identify stress patterns, and verify pronunciation. Despite their clear value in raising awareness, the use of dictionaries primarily facilitated surface-level engagement with pronunciation rather than encouraging active and confident use of pronunciation in spoken communication. Consequently, the materials and classroom

activities observed tended to develop receptive phonological skills, at the expense of communicative pronunciation competence.

The teaching techniques employed were strongly influenced by the nature of the materials, focusing on phonetic training and explicit learning. These techniques included transcription and its decoding (e.g. matching transcribed words with their spelling representations using a dictionary) and sometimes ear training (e.g. dictation of sentences with silent letters). Lessons often concluded with plenary discussions, where the teacher corrected errors, guided students in repeating the correct pronunciations, and provided brief explanation. However, these explanations were often limited to pointing out rules rather than analysing them in detail. This approach prioritized written language and abstract sound representations, fostering orthographic awareness rather than true phonological development. For instance, the dictation of silent letters focused more on the relationship between phonemes and graphemes than on their production in speech. While valuable for building foundational phonological competence, this repetitive and unilateral approach had significant limitations. It prioritized skills with limited real-life applicability (e.g. transcription) and offered few opportunities for learners to actively use targeted features in spoken contexts. This was further reinforced by the frequent individual task format, which limited interactive practice.

Most observed activities appeared disconnected from preceding or subsequent tasks, suggesting that pronunciation was targeted specifically due to the researchers' presence in the classroom. The decontextualised materials and narrowly focused content made it challenging for the teacher to seamlessly integrate pronunciation tasks into the lesson flow. Consequently, opportunities for practical application of targeted features over time were limited. In some cases, the degree of integration was unclear due the significant portion of the lesson devoted to pronunciation. However, one successful example involved integrating the unpredictable pronunciation of irregular past forms into a lesson on narrative tenses (past simple, past continuous, past perfect. and past perfect continuous).

Table 1. Data gathered by Lesson Observations of the Teacher

Lesson observations		
	Categories	Codes
1	The contents of pronunciation teaching	Segmentals – vocabulary with unpredictable pronunciation, silent letters, past forms of irregular verbs, homonyms Suprasegmentals – lexical stress
2	The materials used for pronunciation teaching	Adapted - handouts Semi-authentic – translation dictionary
3	The techniques used for pronunciation teaching	Phonetic training – transcription, matching spelling and transcription Explicit learning – marking lexical stress Ear training – dictation Listening and repeating
4	The integration of the tasks	Not integrated, inconsistently integrated

Teacher Interview Analysis

The interview with the observed teacher provided valuable insights and enhanced understanding of the observational data, particularly regarding their approach to pronunciation teaching, choice of content, materials and techniques, as well as their self-reflection and attitudes toward this aspect of language instruction. The teacher stated that pronunciation practice is a regular part of their English language lessons, with an intensive focus during the first year of the bilingual program. In this initial period, an entire month is dedicated to pronunciation instruction, during which students are introduced to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), taught transcription skills, and guided in using dictionaries to access phonetic information. Beyond the first grade, the frequency of pronunciation teaching depends on the group's specific needs. For learners with strong pronunciation skills, the teacher addresses pronunciation less frequently, focusing primarily on areas requiring correction.

Regarding content, the teacher prioritizes error correction of challenging and unpredictable words (segmentals) and word stress, while also addressing suprasegmental features such as weak forms and linking, particularly when these are incorporated in the coursebook. To mediate this content, she claims to employ a mix of adapted and authentic materials. In addition to handouts targeting specific pronunciation features, which she has collected over the years, she regularly uses podcasts and videos to provide real-world input. Dictionaries play a central role in their instruction, serving as a key tool for helping learners independently access phonetic information. The teacher emphasized that the ultimate goal of their pronunciation teaching is to enable students to use dictionaries effectively, supporting their ability to improve pronunciation independently outside the classroom. While using dictionaries for autonomous learning is a good approach, bilingual/translation dictionaries are not always reliable for phonemic transcription. Therefore, monolingual dictionaries would be a better choice.

In terms of techniques, the teacher primarily relies on transcription as a form of phonetic training, complemented by explicit instruction targeting specific pronunciation features. She incorporates ear training activities, such as using podcasts and videos, to raise learners' awareness of pronunciation patterns. While she focuses on British English (Received Pronunciation) and American English (General American) as neutral models for production, she advises learners to remain consistent in their chosen pronunciation model. She also includes recordings of various accents like Scottish or Australian English when these are part of the coursebook, particularly for receptive tasks. However, she expressed the belief that exposure to other variants is unnecessary for the learners unless they plan to visit specific English-speaking regions where such accents are prevalent.

Reflecting on their approach to pronunciation teaching, the teacher described herself as confident and well-prepared, both linguistically and methodologically. She attributed their expertise to years of practical experience, during which she developed an understanding of learners' needs, rather than to university education or any other formal training. Although she considers their current approach effective, she acknowledged that further improvements could be made depending on teaching

priorities. Overall, she affirmed that pronunciation teaching is a crucial aspect of language learning and should be included regularly in English language lessons.

Table 2. Data gathered by Individual Interview with the Observed Teacher

Individual interview with the observed teacher		
	Question categories	Codes
1	The extent of pronunciation teaching	Addressed regularly The extent depends on the needs More intensively in the first grade
2	The content of pronunciation teaching	Segmentals – difficult words, mispronounced words Suprasegmentals – lexical stress, aspects of connected speech
3	The materials used for pronunciation teaching	Adapted – handouts, coursebook Semi-authentic – translation dictionary Authentic materials – videos, podcasts
4	The techniques used for pronunciation teaching	Phonetic training – transcription Ear training Explicit learning
5	The pronunciation models	British English American English Other variants receptively, peripherally
6	The reflection on personal teaching pronunciation competences	Feels methodologically well-prepared Feels linguistically well-prepared Considers their pronunciation teaching sufficient
7	The attitude towards pronunciation teaching	Pronunciation should be taught regularly

Focus Group Interview Analysis

The learners confirmed that pronunciation instruction in English lessons is most intensively addressed in the first grade, with an introduction to transcription and dictionary use. Beyond this stage, pronunciation teaching occurs only occasionally, focusing on new or challenging words and correcting errors as needed. According to the focus group, materials used include handouts targeting specific pronunciation features, listening exercises from coursebooks, and, less frequently, podcasts or videos. These tasks are typically completed individually, such as by looking up explicit information about particular pronunciation patterns. Learners noted that the teacher frequently employs phonetic training, explicit learning, and ear training techniques.

The learners also described the usual procedure for pronunciation instruction, which involves the teacher writing a new or difficult word on the board, providing its transcription, and occasionally adding related explicit learning tasks. British and American English are emphasized as pronunciation models, with limited attention to other varieties. While most of the learners expressed little need to address other

varieties of English, some expressed that exposure to these could enhance receptive skills, indicating interest in a broader understanding of English variants.

Reflecting on their experience with pronunciation instruction, learners generally did not see the need for activities focused solely on improving pronunciation, as they felt their current level of exposure was sufficient for developing strong pronunciation skills. However, they valued the teacher's guidance in identifying and addressing problematic areas, which they considered helpful, albeit repetitive and monotonous.

Table 3. Data gathered by Focus Group Interview with the observed Group of Learners

Focus group interview with the observed group of learners		
	Question categories	Codes
1	The extent of pronunciation teaching	Addressed occasionally The extent depends on the needs More intensively in the first grade
2	The content of pronunciation teaching	Segmentals – difficult words, mispronounced words
3	The materials used for pronunciation teaching	Adapted – handouts, coursebook Semi-authentic – translation dictionary Authentic – videos, podcasts
4	The techniques used for pronunciation teaching	Phonetic training – transcription Explicit learning Ear training
5	The pronunciation models	British English American English Other variants receptively, peripherally
6	The attitudes towards pronunciation teaching	Pronunciation is taught sufficiently Pronunciation does not need to be taught

Discussion and Triangulation

This section provides a comprehensive understanding of the teacher's approach to pronunciation teaching by comparing data from lesson observations, an interview with the teacher, and a focus group interview with their students. It evaluates the strengths and limitations of the observed practices while addressing the research questions of this study.

Research question 1: *“How is English pronunciation taught in a selected English bilingual programme class?”*

The data consistently show that pronunciation teaching is present in the teacher's lessons, although its extent remains unclear. While the teacher claimed it is addressed regularly, students reported it occurs only occasionally. Both agreed that the first grade of the bilingual program receives the most intensive focus, beyond this stage, pronunciation teaching becomes sporadic and is tailored to learners' immediate

needs. While this approach addresses specific challenges, it lacks the consistency necessary for systematic skill development across grade levels.

Regarding content, all data sources confirm the teacher's focus on segmental features, particularly error correction and challenging vocabulary. Suprasegmental aspects receive minimal attention, with lexical stress observed and connected speech mentioned by the teacher. Students noted a focus exclusively on segmental elements related to unique or unpredictable vocabulary. However, as observed, this focus is largely restricted to relationship between spelling and pronunciation. Implemented primarily through transcription and written tasks, the teaching leans more toward orthographic awareness than communicative pronunciation skills, lacking emphasis on spoken output. By neglecting to integrate target features into meaningful contexts, the teacher misses opportunities to enhance learners' fluency and naturalness in speech. Additionally, it is important to note that neither segmental nor suprasegmental aspects arising from Slovak interference in the English were addressed, leaving a critical area of pronunciation teaching unaddressed.

The materials and techniques used for pronunciation teaching also showed significant limitations, particularly due to their decontextualized and repetitive nature. As confirmed by all three data sources, the materials—predominantly adapted handouts and bilingual/translation dictionaries—are heavily focused on phonetic training and explicit learning. While these materials help raise learners' awareness of targeted pronunciation features, their effectiveness is diminished by the lack of meaningful context for applying the learned content. We believe that the teacher's reliance on such decontextualized materials limits their ability to effectively integrate pronunciation tasks into the lesson flow. The observed pronunciation tasks often appeared disconnected or isolated from the broader objectives of the lesson, further reducing opportunities for practical application of the targeted features. Thus, although the materials' content was relevant, their lack of integration prevented sufficient elaboration. Although the teacher reported using authentic materials, such as videos and podcasts, which was confirmed in the focus group interview, these did not appear in the observed lessons. This suggests that their implementation might be limited and not specifically focused on pronunciation practice.

Similarly, the techniques employed, as confirmed by observations and both interviews, primarily include phonetic training, explicit learning, less frequently ear training, and listening and repeating. These techniques are heavily focused on representation of sounds and written language (e.g. practising transcription skills and using dictionaries) at the expense of active spoken production. Limited opportunities for actual pronunciation practice emerged in the observed lessons. Even when such opportunities arise (e.g. listening and repeating or plenary discussions of correct answers), they were isolated, repetitive, and lacked integration into meaningful contexts, which reduced their real-world communicative value. These techniques mainly develop receptive skills and raise their awareness of the pronunciation features but do not provide sufficient interactive practice for acquiring these skills.

As reported and criticized by the focus group, the repetitive nature of the techniques and procedures made the approach monotonous, predictable, and unilateral. Combined with the abstract nature of the tasks and the lack of engaging

elements, this approach is unsustainable in the long term, even for the most motivated learners.

In discussing the pronunciation model used in the classroom, both the teacher and learners acknowledged a consistent focus on British English and American English, with limited attention to other varieties of English, primarily for receptive purposes when included in coursebook recordings. However, the teacher and some learners felt that exposure to other English accents was unnecessary, but some focus group members expressed an interest in gaining a general understanding of various accents. While choosing neutral models like British Received Pronunciation and General American is reasonable for productive tasks, the view that exposure to various English accents is unnecessary is misguided. In today's globalized world, learners are likely to encounter various accents even without traveling to regions where specific varieties are spoken. Therefore, it is essential for learners to develop an awareness of global English variations (Crystal, 2009; Holden & Nobre, 2019) to effectively adapt and comprehend English in diverse linguistic contexts.

Research question 2: *"How does the chosen English language teacher perceive and integrate pronunciation teaching into their English language lessons?"*

Research question 3: *"How do students in an English bilingual programme perceive pronunciation teaching during their English language lessons?"*

The teacher and the learners reflected differently on the role and importance of pronunciation teaching. While the teacher emphasised its importance in equipping learners with skills to independently improve their pronunciation through dictionary use, students expressed little need for focused pronunciation activities, viewing their current exposure as sufficient. However, the teacher's indirect approach, prioritizing dictionary-based tasks over direct phonological development, lacks sufficient guidance and fails to provide immediate improvements in learners' pronunciation. Pronunciation teaching, to be fully effective, should combine awareness-raising with systematic practice, incorporate content relevant to learners' linguistic background (e.g. focusing on Slovak interference aspects), and promote active production in meaningful communicative contexts.

Despite expressing confidence in their pronunciation teaching, the teacher's reliance on experience and intuition over formal training revealed notable gaps in their methodological knowledge and critical reflection. Their limited focus, lack of integration, and repetitive approach restricted opportunities for learners to engage with pronunciation in a comprehensive and motivating way. Similarly, students' perception of the current instruction as sufficient reflects a limited understanding of the broader benefits of structured pronunciation teaching, likely due to the narrow range of techniques, activities, and content they have experienced. Evidence from university-level courses supports this interpretation, that students are often surprised by the extent of their pronunciation gaps when taking phonetics and phonology courses. Similarly, in the methodology of pronunciation course, student teachers are frequently surprised how many engaging activities can be incorporated into English language classes at all proficiency levels. These insights suggest that both teachers and learners would benefit from a broader methodological repertoire, the greater awareness of the importance of pronunciation, and more purposeful integration of

engaging pronunciation activities into classroom practice. The triangulated data therefore indicate that while the teacher's approach addresses some immediate learner needs, its narrow scope, limited communicative context, and lack of engaging techniques and activities fail to support systematic and long-term pronunciation development.

Table 4. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Teacher's Pronunciation Instruction analysed by Data Triangulation

The summary of data triangulation			
	Category	Strengths	Weaknesses
1	The extent of pronunciation teaching	Foundational skills intensively addressed in the first grade	Sporadic, inconsistent, reactive approach beyond the first grade
2	The content of pronunciation teaching	Covered pronunciation features relevant to the target learner	Overemphasis on segmental features Decontextualized language items The conflation of pronunciation with orthography
3	The materials used for pronunciation teaching	Targeted pronunciation practice by adapted materials in combination with semi-authentic materials	The lack of authentic materials The lack of context The lack of interactivity
4	Integration of the activities	Past tense task successfully integrated	Pronunciation activities disconnected from lesson objectives No meaningful application
5	Techniques used for pronunciation teaching	Awareness-raising potential of the techniques	Focus on receptive skills No meaningful practice in spoken production Unilateral, repetitive use of techniques
6	Models used for pronunciation teaching	Emphasis on the consistent use of neutral models for production Peripheral attention to regional English varieties for receptive purposes	Awareness of regional varieties of English perceived as unnecessary
7	Reflection on teaching competences	The teacher pays attention to pronunciation, based on their experience	Over-reliance on experience rather than formal training Confidence in the approaches used The lack of critical reflection
8	Reflections on the Importance of Pronunciation Teaching	The teacher recognizes the importance of pronunciation teaching The learners do not recognize the importance of pronunciation teaching	Learners' acceptance of the teacher's approach The teacher's misunderstanding of the learners' needs

Conclusion, Limitations and Implications

This study has provided valuable insights and a deep understanding of the teacher's pronunciation teaching practices, their motivations, attitudes as well as the learners' perspective on the subject matter. Despite these contributions, the findings cannot be generalised to broader contexts due to the small-scale, case study design. However, generalizability is not the primary aim of qualitative research. To ensure greater reliability and validity of data in this field, future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample (addressing multiple variables, such as different target learners, types of teaching programmes, or years of experience of the teachers), allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of pronunciation teaching across various settings. Nonetheless, despite its limited generalizability, several broadly applicable recommendations for pedagogical practice can be formulated based on the results of this case study:

- Pronunciation should be incorporated as a regular and systematic component of language learning across all grade levels rather than being limited to specific periods of learning or addressed only according to immediate needs. This approach ensures continuous skill development, helping learners build a strong phonological foundation.
- A variety of content should be included, with equal focus on segmental and suprasegmental features, ensuring learners' improvement in both areas, as these are equally crucial for intelligibility in speech. Additionally, it is essential to address pronunciation issues arising from language interference at both levels to help learners overcome potential difficulties.
- Adapted materials should be complemented with a broader range of multimodal and authentic resources, such as videos, podcasts, movies or recordings, to provide learners with exposure to natural language and create a more engaging and practical learning experience.
- Pronunciation practice should naturally emerge from the content of the lesson, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, whether grammar, vocabulary, or other language skills. Selecting materials that align with the lesson's content and broader objectives facilitates the natural integration of pronunciation tasks. Easily adaptable, "universal" pronunciation teaching materials and techniques, including various pronunciation games, are well-suited for this purpose.
- Receptive and productive pronunciation teaching techniques should be combined in contextualized and communicative activities, such as tongue twisters, drills, pronunciation games, quizzes, role-plays, or analyses of authentic speech. These approaches encourage active practice in meaningful contexts, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and engagement of pronunciation teaching.
- Neutral, standardised and commonly used accents of English (such as Received Pronunciation or General American) are suitable models for production, whereas exposing learners to a wider range of English varieties for receptive purposes is essential to prepare them for communication in international contexts.

- Professional development opportunities for teachers are crucial to addressing gaps in methodological preparedness and equipping them with innovative, evidence-based strategies for effective pronunciation teaching.
- Teachers should focus on raising learners' awareness of the importance of accurate pronunciation for improving intelligibility by regularly integrating meaningful pronunciation tasks into their lessons.

This research aimed to highlight the importance of pronunciation teaching, identify its weaknesses, explore the underlying causes of these challenges, and propose areas for improvement along with potential solutions. Although the study focused on a teacher who demonstrated confidence in teaching pronunciation, the findings revealed that the instruction, while present, was unsystematic and lacked clear focus. These results are consistent with previous research studies (Scrivener, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010; Vančová, 2020; Reid & Debnarova, 2023).

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