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THE PHONOLOGICAL FACTOR IN THE PRONUNCIATION OF
VOWEL SOUNDS IN THE FIRST LEVEL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS FROM “MARÍA AUXILIADORA” SCHOOL, 2018

TESIS DE GRADO:

EL FACTOR FONOLÓGICO EN LA PRONUNCIACIÓN DE VOCALES
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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College. I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

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STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

I, Karol Stephanie González Guerra, affirm that the following investigation in the present thesis report research is totally unique, authentic and personal.

The content of this research is a limited legal and academic responsibility of the author and PUCE Esmeraldas.

Karol Stephanie González Guerra

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ABSTRACT

One of the main concerns of the phonological factor is on learners' accurate pronunciation of sounds. With the purpose of describing the phonological factor development in the pronunciation of vowel sounds in learners of EFL, an explorative qualitative research was undertaken. An observation was done to identify the fluency while using the English language, and pronunciation of vowels difficulties, followed by an interview to English teachers from Maria Auxiliadora School, finalizing with a focus group where 10 students selected at random were challenged in order to establish how learners use English during lessons. Results evidenced that assimilation is the main phonological difficulty in EFL students which is due to an inaccurate English pronunciation. In addition, most students present similar phonological difficulties with the pronunciation of rounded vowels, especially /u: /, /ʊ/ and the semi-open back unrounded /ʌ/. As for English teachers, to improve their training on teaching pronunciation is important, so they can overcome students' phonological issues. These results coincide with the previous studies in Esmeraldas, where such phonological issues and inaccuracy is frequent on students of different levels. In conclusion, EFL students need to work on pronunciation of vowels development, while teachers should emphasize more on pronunciation exercises which are frequently regarded as unimportant.

Key Words: phonological factor – pronunciation – vowel sounds – rounded vowels – EFL

RESUMEN

Uno de los principales cuidados que tiene el factor fonológico es procurar la precisa pronunciación de sonidos. Con el propósito de describir el desarrollo del factor fonológico en la pronunciación de vocales en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, fue realizada una investigación explorativa-cualitativa. Se hizo una observación para identificar la fluidez de los estudiantes al hablar en inglés, y las dificultades que podrían tener al pronunciar las vocales, seguida de una entrevista a los docentes de inglés del colegio “María Auxiliadora”. Finalizando con un grupo focal, donde 10 estudiantes elegidos al azar fueron desafiados para establecer cómo los estudiantes usan el inglés durante las clases. Los resultados evidencian que la asimilación es una de las principales dificultades fonológicas para estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, debido a una pronunciación poco precisa. Además, la mayoría de los estudiantes presentó dificultades fonológicas con las vocales redondeadas, en especial: /u:/, /ʊ/ y en la vocal semi abierta /ʌ/. Así mismo, para los docentes de inglés es necesario capacitarse para mejorar la enseñanza de la pronunciación y así ellos puedan ayudar a superar las dificultades fonológicas de los estudiantes. Estos resultados coinciden con los estudios previos realizados en Esmeraldas, donde dichas complicaciones fonológicas y poca precisión es frecuente en estudiantes de diferentes niveles. En conclusión, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera deben trabajar en el desarrollo de la pronunciación de vocales, mientras que los docentes deben enfatizar más en ejercicios fonológicos que son frecuentemente considerados no importantes.

Palabras clave: factor fonológico – pronunciación – sonido de las vocales – vocales redondeadas – EFL

INTRODUCTION

Theme presentation

Nowadays, people are surrounded by situations which involve the strongly interaction among individuals. Migration, expeditions, and especially tourism are the main factors that must relate everyone with the development of the communicative functions of the language. The best opportunity people have to learn how to speak and develop their productive and receptive skills is during Basic Education, yet according to studies in terms of Ecuador, around the 41% of students of secondary levels take advantage of their studies in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The Ecuadorian Government has implemented English teaching as mandatory for high school students, because English must be taken as an important subject in all educational institutions. Lack of accurate vocabulary, poor verbal communication and lack of training that teachers provide would stop the flow of any kind of interaction. People must learn to communicate freely because as practice provides more chances to develop their phonological factor in a better way.

EFL students in Esmeraldas tend to develop syntax and grammar more than phonological skills because most English teachers are focused on fulfilling tight curricular programs rather than providing comprehensive multi-skill English lessons. As a consequence of this, students acquire knowledge about grammatical structures and sentences construction but pronunciation. The phonological factor is concerned with how learners pronounce English sounds by being clear that there is not a perfect pronunciation but an accurate one.

Most EFL non-English speakers-learners around the world are not fluent English speakers. They struggle by trying to communicate perfectly in a completely new target language. Students should know there is not such a perfect pronunciation, students must aim for accuracy. This project degree intends to provide an overview about the students' pronunciation and comprehension of the English language in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. For

this, senior high school students from “Maria Auxiliadora” School were observed to determine how they overcome difficulties of English vowels pronunciation.

Problem Statement

This research is focused on finding out the pronunciation difficulties senior high school students have for English vowel sounds. According to Olivo (2016), one of the main reasons for students’ bad pronunciation is the lack of influence of their mother tongue awareness (i.e. interference). On the other hand, another reason seems to be a poor phonological factor development. This investigation describes the phonological difficulties learners of EFL in Esmeraldas-Ecuador have to pronounce vowel sounds.

Unlike other skills, phonological errors are tolerated without an immediate correctness. Spanish learners of EFL must take in mind that the English phonological system has around 12 vowels sounds, but there are not just 5 like in Spanish. Teachers must help students concerning on pronunciation by using strategies and methodologies to activate students’ acquisition and proper monitoring.

However, one of the sticking points of all English teachers is to get students to speak in English inside and outside of the classroom. One of the teachers’ main difficulties is the absent of appropriate training about didactic resources concerning the phonological issues of students. In order to develop strategies, it is required to describe the main issues that students face during their acquisition process. Because of this, the problem of this research is the following: What are the phonological difficulties first year of high school learners of English as a Foreign Language in “Maria Auxiliadora” School have to pronounce vowel sounds?

There have been several transformations in Ecuador educational system, since 2010 government schools in Esmeraldas presented English as a particular subject non-mandatory. Around 2016 the Ministry of Education set the English teaching as mandatory, even though pronunciation development is out of the limelight in ELT. For that reason, there is a clearly delimited target of students’ level.

Esmeraldas is a small city and authorities have regarded the English teaching focusing on other subjects, but aspiring senior high school students with B1 level. Everyone must communicate in English because it helps to cross barriers of communication, helping students to succeed in their future studies. EFL senior high school students do not have an accurate pronunciation of the language because of a particularity, the vowels sound.

Justification

Teaching EFL includes guiding students to their development of competences and skills to comprehend the language. The Ministry of Education in Ecuador made teaching English as mandatory, hence teaching should be integral following the standards to boost teachers an accurate and effective teaching.

This project seeks to describe attention deficits that students in Esmeraldas have while learning English words by putting special attention on the pronunciation of vowel sounds, because learners do not receive an appropriate instruction during the development of the phonological factor. Esmeraldas' English teachers' training about didactic material for improving pronunciation is not enough.

Hume (1997) considered vowel sounds as the complicated sounds to pronounce for EFL students because vowels tend to change their sounds according to their position into a word. Thus, English teachers must be trained with methods and strategies for learners at improving pronunciation. By having a successful teaching-learning process most of learners can develop easily communicative functions and competences if they have an accurate English pronunciation.

This study is important because the difficulties of EFL senior high school students to pronounce vowel sounds have been identified and described. Currently, in Esmeraldas authorities have been working on the improvement of teaching because before 2016 the city was amongst the lower ranked cities as of educational level (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). The focus on vowels sounds is justified on an observation where it was noticed that senior high school students' consonants sounds were more accurately taught than vowel sounds.

This research seeks to set the grounds for an impact in the importance of teaching pronunciation and aims to reinforce similar previous studies in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Students' pronunciation must be encouraged to be improved by working with accuracy and later on improving the phonological factor.

Objectives

General Objective

To describe the phonological factor development in the pronunciation of vowel sounds in learners of English as a foreign language.

Specific Objectives

- To establish the main difficulties that senior high school students of EFL have to pronounce vowel sounds.
- To recognize the phonological factor which may lead senior high school students to pronounce vowel sounds inaccurately.
- To identify the English teachers' strategies and material used for helping students improve the pronunciation of vowel sounds.

CHAPTER I:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Phonology

By talking in terms of phonology there are several definitions of it. According to Schwartz & Marton, “Phonology is the communicative link that allows language speakers and listeners to encode and decode the intention, meaning, and the structure of language” (2009, p.4). It is quite close to the definition proposed by Odden (2013), “phonology is the study of sound structure in language, which is different from the study of sentence structure (syntax), or word structure (morphology), or how languages change over time (historical linguistics)” (p. 2).

The previous definition is very simple comparing to what phonology is and with what it concerns, the structure of sounds. But it is also “inadequate” according to Odden itself because if someone is referring to phonology is important to talk about pronunciation. “An important feature of structure of a sentence is how it is pronounced” (Odden, 2013, p.2), the pronunciation and phonology are related to provide a structure to sounds and words.

Phonology differs from other linguistic disciplines because it is focused on different studies of the language. But phonetics keeps on the line of the same branch. Even though, phonetics deals with speech sounds, or “physical sounds”, “Speech is a complicated process, and to study it requires a whole scientific science –the science of phonetics” (Roach, 2004, p.5). And that must include the study of how speech sounds are made and how they are classified. On the other hand, phonology deals with the symbolic sounds. In fact, it is an abstract cognitive system dealing with rules in a mental grammar, for that reason they can be called mental abstract sounds (Odden, 2013, p.2).

When it comes down to mechanisms, this is normally interpreted to differentiate between Competence as the domain of discrete variables (that is, symbols and symbol structures) as they are reconfigured and processed in discrete time. Processing time involves discrete jumps between system states when a rule is executed. (The structure of events in real time associated with the pronunciation of words is also discrete but is encoded as the ordering of static objects like segments, words and other syntactic units.) In opposition to this is Performance, the domain of continuous variables evolving in real (continuous) time. The continuous variables include processes related to motor control, audition and speech perception. (Port, 1996)

According to this, the language is strongly close to phonology and it develops the pronunciation with accuracy. The particle phonology deals constantly with the generative phonology that belongs to a study by Chomsky and Halle which affects to vowels and diphthongs directly provoking undergone changes. Sanford (1984) has exposed the “inability of the standards” that characterize the internal structure of vowels, thus there are two main factors that modifies vowels’ structure. The first one is the relationships between vowels and diphthongs and he called the second “mirroring” which is a phenomenon of the generative phonology about the notation in regard to what could happen if one vowel is to the left or right into a syllable. The particle phonology is important because describes vowels and diphthongs, their internal structure, the relation between them and changes.

1.1.1 Phonology as the Main Component of the Linguistic System

The linguistic system has different levels in which the core is phonetics. According to Yule (2017) thinking about the components of the human language is to think in the multi-layered scheme of a planet. People is capable to produce infinite and different sounds (p.43), which are abstracted into a set of finite forms, or phonemes. All these sounds present different characteristics that made them special and unique to express and communicate several ideas. The main finite forms observed there are classified into vowel sounds and consonant sounds.

Shusterman (2012), exposed that phonetics includes the speech sounds which has two main approaches. The first one studies the articulatory system and the second deals with acoustic phonetics that is related to the analysis of sounds. Linking, the acoustic phonetics is center of this investigation, because of dealing with vowels and consonants’ sounds.

The production of sounds involves a complex psychomotricity process that starts from muscular contraction. At first, chest muscles are contracted to produce the airflow that will go through the larynx, then that air goes up through the vocal tract to end in the mouth producing the sound. All that process need articulators, which are the reasons for the sounds production (Roach, 1991, p.9).

Nevertheless, if vowels and consonants are compared, it is easier to find the differences. For producing vowels sounds there is any obstruction in the vocal tract to produce them, that is why they are known as voiceless. On the contrary, consonant sounds have a significant number of contractions for producing the different sounds (Roach, 1991, pp.10-11).

1.1.2 Theories of Phonological Development

While children are growing up, they start to develop their phonological capacities, a fact that has been under research since the development of chomskian Generative Phonology. When children start producing sounds they also are learning to recognize and pronounce sounds of their target language to show their competences as native speakers (Winitz, 1981). All humans develop sound producing abilities and competences when, as children, they coo and babble at first that may subsequently lead to the development of different patterns and an appropriate structure to produce utterances or phrases.

There are theories which support these processes behind the main factors that influence the acquisition and development of phonology. For this research, the phonological development is focused on the English language. In general, a theory of the phonological development must account for the development of certain characteristics in the people's speech.

Dodd et al. (2003) proposed a normative study about the phonological development of English-speaking children. According to them, the phonological development can be analyzed in two ways, the 'phonetic' and 'phonemic' acquisition. When mentioning the term 'phonetic' refers to the speech sound production, articulatory and motor skills, while 'phonemic' refers to the use functions and behavior (p.618). Even though, all that development depended on the strategies and methodologies used. Thus, there were two

concerns related to methodological issues and the used criteria: a) when children develop the sounds acquisition by themselves and what they have around or in their environment, and b) the group development when the acquisition of sounds by heterogeneous groups (different ages) is analyzed. Those might be an issue to recognize the factors that lead the phonological development (Dodd et al., 2003, p.622).

According to Gard et al. (1993), the phonological development is more than a process of sound acquisition, it is a series of steps that take into account specific characteristics children acquire and develop. The first step starts since children are born until the time they start interacting with others, since the 0 months until the 6-7 years. A chart was presented where all the process of the stage is explained.

Children start babbling and producing glottal sounds and vowels because the air flows easily through the vocal tract. Then, children start vocalizing, by using a variety of sound combinations non-English necessary. By the age of two years, children ask questions using intonation and structures of CVC. When reaching the age of 3, they begin vocalizing consonants (bilabial and dental primarily /p,m,b,n/). And, by the age of 6-7 children master all the consonants (voice and voiceless) (p.1).

There is a difference between the cognitive process (i.e. what people have in their brains), and what it is actually produced, and is comprehensible because of competence and performance meanings. “A theory of phonological development must account for the development of all the characteristics of an adult phonology [...], as well as the known facts of child phonology [...]” (Ferguson & Garnika, 1975).

1.1.3 Teaching Phonology and its Importance for EFL Learners

Language is the main channel of communication and socialization. For instance, when children are starting school, it allows the interaction with others and develops their phonological factor because of the speaking practice. There are three main processes to teach phonology: the syllabic structure and assimilation, the substitution process which deals with changes between sound classes and the process of assimilation of sounds that deals with teaching phonology because the speaker must analyze which sound is part of the next syllable. In this way, with this last process children start to create their own

linguistic system by assimilation of sounds, especially vowel sounds (Galindo, De Andrade & Manchester, 2013, pp.837-838).

Teaching pronunciation has been one of the most important changes in the scale of education and in the history of language learning, even though the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) still being used by English teachers as tool that contains all the different symbols that each language has as their distinctive sounds. Nevertheless, phonology has been one of "...the most neglected aspects of English language teaching, pronunciation has gained attention only in the past half of the 20th century with the rise of Audiolingualism and the Direct Method" (Saidi, 2017, p.1). For this reason several English teachers and some applied linguists had had to deal with teaching this skill since a long time ago.

In order to teach phonology, teachers must take into consideration the constancy and quality of activities students develop while they are developing the phonological factor. According to this, Jones (2002) highlighted the importance of the phonological acquisition because of a formation and imitation practice.

Part of the reason for the focus on habit-formation in acquiring L2 phonology is the special characteristic of pronunciation, which, unlike other language skills, involves both cognitive and motor functions: few would deny that repeated practice of motor functions results in increased dexterity. (p. 180)

Thus, Jones proposed several techniques that teachers of English as a foreign language can use during the development of their classes. One of them is the identification of minimal pairs. Also, Cook (2008) present common pronunciation examples such as "[...] "car" / ka:/ versus "cow" / kaʊ/ or "bra" /bra:/ versus "brow" /braʊ/ [...]" (Cook, 2008, pp.69-70). In this case, the teacher will know they had practiced pronunciation when the students can identify the difference between them.

Among other initiatives, Broughton et al. (1980) presented a teaching sequence strategy in terms of classroom procedures. "[...] teaching sequence must therefore be organized in terms of priorities and degrees of difficulty. The [...] time devoted to specifically pronunciation teaching depends on the larger priorities of the course [...]" (p. 62).

Because of this, the practice of pronunciation must be applied during the entire lesson every possible time.

1.1.3.1 Non-Native English Teachers

English teachers make the difference in teaching. Which one might be a better English teacher? A non-native English teacher, or a native English teacher? The answer is that depending on the individual, both can be good English teachers. Beare (2018) exposed that what a non-native English teacher needs is practice, experience and improve himself/herself.

Beare's point of view is related to Martin's (2013) when was exposed that it is not a difficulty to be a nonnative English teacher, but the way in which they are instructed makes the difference. Also, two factors were established that deal with the development of ESL/EFL: the principles of nativeness and intelligibility. The first principle explains that it is feasible and desirable to learn a L2 speech as a native language no matter the age, and the second principle is an ability that the learner develop for comprehend the new language and understand the utterances (pp.5-6).

Thus, non-native English teachers must base their learning on working with the mentioned two principles. In that way they could focus their comprehensibility about the teaching-learning process of EFL. Also, Martin (2013) presented that the 80% of English teachers around the globe are non-native. There is where come from the importance of English teachers construct constantly their own knowledge. Non-native English teachers must follow the native English teacher as support for their classes, but most of them avoid this because of the thought of creating a range of superiority for the native English teachers (p.9).

1.1.4 Phonological Factor

Schwartz et al. (2015) explain that the development of the phonological factor regard on Flege's theory called Speech Learning Model (SLM) developed in 1995 proposing an alternative view to the previously "critical period" perspective:

Speech Learning Model (SLM). The SLM was developed in response to findings that challenged the traditional claim of a 'critical period' for foreign language learning, after which a foreign accent was assumed to be inevitable. Instead of a critical period, the SLM postulates that the mechanisms involved in L1 phonological learning remain active over the lifespan, and may also apply to L2 learning. (p.183)

Thus, by summarizing the idea of the author, the SLM deals with the evolution of phonetic categories and phonological structures according to the speaker's linguistic experiences. This means that the phonological factor is related to speakers and with the interaction they have had since they started to interact with others.

The phonological factor plays an important role while pronouncing sounds. For the EFL acquisition, it concerns on the perception and discrimination of phonemes. For non-native English speakers that might be an elevated difficulty, because the interaction is valuable for the phonological factor development and the discrimination of certain phonemes compromise the well-pronunciation for EFL learners. Davidson (2011) regarded that action as natural, because the brain does not assimilate those new words easily. Thus, interaction helps in the assimilation of those new patters (p.1).

Even though, for Mohammad & Fatehi (2016) interaction is not the only way for the development of the phonological factor, what it usually helps is the development the reading skills. Reading includes all the different aspects for non-native English speakers to improve not only the grammatical awareness but also the phonological factor. It is important to EFL students start with indirectly readings in the target language to do make of the lecture boring and monotonous to learners keep themselves motivated. Also, teachers could help learners at being an intermediary in the reading providing support (p.1170).

Shumin (2002) explained that learning to speak a new language requires more than grammatical knowledge. In fact, EFL learners should know how natives use the language in an intrapersonal context. That is the main reason interaction is necessary for developing the phonological factor and improve the assimilation of sounds/phonemes (p.204).

The phonological factor deals with the Natural Phonology because while a child is acquiring language there are processes of assimilation, structure and substitution of

phonemes. So, the phonological factor is in the speaker's mind because the natural phonology indicates an addition of phonemes in relation with the speaker's knowledge or input of the language. It is developed naturally with the linguistic experiences the speaker has had (Carrillo, 2017, p.2). The phonological factor refers to every sound and its patterns.

Bergeron (2017) explained skills related to the phonological awareness in learners of EFL. The first one is the speaking skill that includes the awareness of sounds and its patterns: words, syllables, rhymes, and phonemes in English. Then, there is the listening skill to identify and produce sounds (p.2).

1.1.5 Pronunciation

Cruttenden (2014) stated that “the term ‘pronunciation’ covers both phonetics and phonemics” (p.4). Thus, it means more than producing sounds. When it refers about ‘phonetics’ means the relation between the word and the sound, but when it says ‘phonemics’ deals with the articulation for producing minimum sound, vocalic or consonant.

Even though, Carter et al. (2011) established that pronunciation involves “[...] how we say words”. Nevertheless, this regarded on the place or by who the sound is produce or the word is pronounced. The use of standard English pronunciation is mentioned because it expresses formality and caring between the speakers. As a consequence of that, English pronunciation is spoken with a specific accent of the speakers' origin.

How we use spoken stress and rhythm is also an important part of pronunciation. For example, it is important to know which syllables in a word are stressed and how different patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables are pronounced. There are also common patterns of intonation in English which enable us to give special emphasis to particular words, phrases and sentences. (Carter et al., 2011)

In this way, pronunciation includes characteristics that will help the speaker to produce sounds with coherence and cohesion, because the message starts in the brain and through the linguistic structures is possible to create sentences.

Also, for Maniruzzaman (2007) in terms of teaching and learning as a foreign language said that “Pronunciation is an integrated and integral part of second/foreign language

learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as well as performance to a substantial extent". As it is so related with the development of communicative competences, teaching pronunciation keeps the same and no-new methods.

By only using the audio-lingual and grammar translation methods, it tends to make of the process monotonous, tedious and repetitive. Anyway, this is a possible consequence because English teachers usually take into consideration minimal pairs, drills and short conversations as activities for improving pronunciation (Maniruzzaman, 2007). To develop a good pronunciation of the foreign language is vital so people can understand notwithstanding, it is not necessary as non-native English speaker to use the language as native. It is well-known what it matters, an accurate but non-necessary perfect pronunciation (Tlazalo & Basurto, 2014).

Pronunciation is an important feature in the personal speech not properly well taught (Pourhosein & Banou, 2016, p.967). People can understand English speakers with a limited knowledge about the language but with an accurate and legible pronunciation, on the other hand it is impossible to understand others with an extensive vocabulary and knowledge but with a terrible pronunciation. There is where teaching pronunciation is so remarkable for EFL learners' lives (Yates & Zielinski, 2009). For that reason, Tlazalo & Basurto (2014) established five levels in which English teachers should focused while teaching appropriately this feature of the speech: language in classroom, mechanical, contextualized, meaningful and real.

1.1.5.1 Principles of Pronunciation

Pedrazzini (2016) exposed that pronunciation was part of the Reform Movement since the nineteenth century, this movement which dealt with English teaching were pronunciation took a root as a theoretically founded aspect (p.1).

Murcia et al. (1996) presented two approaches concerning on pronunciation and its development: a) the intuitive-imitative approach, based on practice because help to develop learners' ability for listening and imitate sounds/rhythms of the target language.

And, b) the analytic-linguistic approach, where information and tools are used (i.e. phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions and charts) to establish vocal structures and aids for improving productive and receptive skills, production, fluency and imitation using vary of theories and information related to linguistic competences (pp.2-3).

Thus, teaching pronunciation must be accurate, appropriate materials and activities are needed by thinking on students' range of age, English level, and the native language influence (Songhao, 2011). In addition, Gilbert (2008) compared melody and rhythm with road signs. This means that the learner must focus on be a listener before start speaking. It is important to pay attention on the different sounds, listen and repeat as the main activity for the teacher can use for improving pronunciation (pp.2-5).

For Tharpe (2016) there are principles for teaching pronunciation, such as:

- a) Vowels and Consonants, where does not matter the English level a student has, it is important to teach the phonetic alphabet sounds. It's focused on the five aspects of the teaching process: voicing, duration, clarity, energy and pitch.
- b) Vocalization, there are many muscles intervening for the accurate position of the mouth's articulators for pronouncing words. Teachers must pay attention on guiding students for vocalizing correctly.
- c) Practice, because by practicing students can construct a perfect pronunciation.

1.1.5.2 English Vowel Sounds

Some people think that the English vocalic system consists on just five vowels causing confusion between vowels characters and vowel sounds. The English language includes at least 12 vowel sounds, as it could be observed in Table 1:

Table 1*English Vowel Sounds and Examples*

Vowel sound	Example	Vowel sound	Example
/i/	keep, key	/u:/	food
/ɪ/	ill	/ʊ/	good
/ɛ/	red	/ɔ/	caught
/ɒ/	octopus	/ə/	baker
/ʌ/	cut	/æ/	apple

Note. Retrieved from Kang (2013). Reprinted with permission.

Yoshida (2013) discussed that vowels lead to trickier pronunciations than consonants because of the articulatory movements, “The tongue is floating freely around the mouth, not touching other parts of the vocal tract” (Yoshida, 2013, p.2). This becomes an added difficulty for students as they are not always aware of what exactly is happening inside their mouths as vowels differ from consonants because of two main characteristics, aside of having a free airflow, it differs on behavior. For instance, while consonant sounds appear in the marginal position in the syllable and are generally delimited clearly, vowels form the core of it, located in the middle of the syllabic cluster (Balogné, 2006).

For native Spanish speaking EFL learners, pronunciation is a key issue for developing their communicative competence. The main difficulty is that learners of EFL while acquiring English do not use a familiar standardized one, so that is the inaccuracy in pronunciation. “Needless to say, to enhance ESL students’ ability in English articulation, teachers should develop the awareness towards pronunciation variations while working with them” (Morley, 1991).

1.1.6 Difficulties of Pronunciation in English as a Foreign Language

As pronunciation has been regarded as a non-important aspect in EFL teaching, there is a higher quantity of English teachers without supportive material, tools or guidelines for appropriate teaching pronunciation (Soukaina, 2017, p.2).

Soukaina (2017) exposed that teachers should require to their own intuition for solving problems and help EFL learners to overcome struggles (p.3).

Based on observations of non-English speakers and learners of English as a Foreign Language, many speakers struggled because of notable difficulties. Wold (2006) exposed learners whose first and second language are non-alphabetical had never realized the acquisition of sound/letter rules of the English system. That may be the first reason of the difficulties while learning this language because it tends them to lose their motivation to practice English, to attend classes and to get a lack of progress (p.4).

Researchers affirm that the interference of sounds between the L1 and L2 is one of the principal difficulties EFL learners have. In other words, the difference while producing the sound in the mother tongue or in the target language is consider a linguistic factor in the acquisition of English. According to this, the inconsistency of some English sounds that there are not in the mother tongue has a lot of influence in the spelling and pronunciation (Soukaina, 2017, p.7).

Different nationalities have different difficulties with different aspects of English. For this reason, learners of EFL should work on something else than practice repeatedly until they can pronounce accurately. Learners practice the consonant sounds more than vowels because apparently is less difficult for them. Even though, a great tool is relating the pronunciation with the spelling (Wold, 2006).

1.1.6.1 Difficulties of Non-English-Speakers Pronouncing English Vowels

For learners of EFL, the accurate pronunciation of some English words is not easy because they must pay attention to the pronunciation of several sounds. O'Connor (1980) recommended to take one English sound at time, so with vowel sounds learners should concentrate on the similar sounds of some words. Back then, he proposed repeating all the words aloud, avoiding error anxiety and focusing on the process. The problem occurs when students try to imitate the sounds as native English speakers.

For pedagogical reasons authors consider that, while an accurate articulation is always desirable, pronunciation should not be perfect but accurate for the purpose of

communicating without major difficulties. For instance, a key for non-English speakers of EFL (in this case Spanish-speakers students) is differentiate the Spanish pentavocalical system to the English 12-vowel sound system. Thus, it is important to be aware of making the right shape of the mouth than focusing on the length of the sound (Lin, 2014).

Case (2012) presented difficulties for Spanish learners of EFL. First, vowels. Spanish speakers do not differentiate short and long vowels in English, thus the main complication for pronouncing vowels is learning the minimal pairs. For instance, the words “ship” and “sheep”, “not” or “note” and “pull” or “pool” usually are pronounced in the same way. Then the word stress as the sentence stress, because it might be difficult for Spanish speakers to pick up and point out the main words of the sentence. Finally, intonation difficulties that usually affect men than women, because they could sound flat in English which is complicated for talking in formal situations (p.1).

1.2 Previous Studies

In the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, a booklet related to the English pronunciation was developed under the title of English Pronunciation Teaching. During this research, the communicative language teaching has been taken into consideration to create a discussion and support the validity of the book. “When speaking a foreign language, pronunciation is the aspect that often creates the first impression of the speaker and his/her language skills” (Tergujeff, 2013, p.9). In other words, pronunciation is important for everybody as it helps speakers to deal face to face with the communication and interaction.

In Bogota-Colombia, Guzmán & Martinez (2013) developed a thesis project titled: The Phonetic Interference of the Spanish to the English Language Production of Phonemes /b/ /v/, /θ/ /t/, /ʒ/ /dʒ/, /tʃ/ /ʃ/. This research aims to help students to develop their phonological factor in pronunciation of certain phonemes providing overwhelming conclusions about the lack or deficit of these phonemes:

Taking the proposals as a reference on phonetic interference, L2 learning, contact of languages, non-existent phonemes of the English in Spanish, methods of learning and motivation, the theory

was articulated by the most relevant aspects found in the analysis of the obtained samples with the linguistic variables and extra linguistic validating the raised hypothesis. (p.3)

It is a concern to the purpose of identifying the phonological difficulties on EFL learners related to this thesis. The book mentioned that it is common to switch the phonological patterns while acquiring a new language, because is a natural reaction of the brain. That is the reason of several people low accurate pronunciation.

In Ecuador, a paper focused on the development of pronunciation activities for improving the English Vowel Sounds is related to this thesis research. The country, and most important Esmeraldas' city concerns on tourism, for that teaching pronunciation should be taken as a serious topic for English teachers. The investigation proposed by Tinoco (2017) proposed activities for practicing with EFL students and improve their English vowel sounds pronunciation starting with the statement: "Spanish-speaking learners of English present this problem for the reason that the majority of English sounds differ greatly from the ones of their mother tongue" (Tinoco, 2017, p.15).

By terms of the city, in Esmeraldas, Olivo (2016) discussed the influence of the Spanish in the pronunciation of phonemes /t/ and /d/, as a possible factor for students' inaccurate English pronunciation. Therefore, like this research teachers are involve to look together for helping learners avoid inaccurate pronunciation of words (p.5).

According to Rúa (2018) the mother tongue is a main influence while acquiring a new language, in this case English as a foreign language. Thus, from there start most of the difficulties on pronunciation students have. It is important to highlight that the roots of a person's language deals with the accuracy on pronouncing words in another languages.

The communicative competences should be developed in people by interacting with others, that is what Quiñonez (2016) exposed. Communicative competences in English must be implemented by the English department, providing them an appropriate environment using all the possible didactic resources and strategies to learners can improve themselves in the fields of phonology, semantics, grammar, and so on.

1.3 Legal Foundation

1.3.1 General Principles

The right for education is guaranteed to Ecuadorians from 5 years old, and determines the principles and general aims that concerns Ecuadorian education in intercultural and multicultural frames (Ley de Educación Intercultural, 2011). In addition, the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 has been established about the right to higher education and the equality in opportunities to access to an academic and professional formation. Teachers are motivated to develop strategies for inclusion in the teaching learning process (Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior, 2018).

According to the educational system, the higher education indicates the teaching process as requirement in the initial levels. The different objectives are established by the Ministry of Education and they should be accomplished to complete the quality standards of education (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2012).

There are principles in which the teaching process must include English as a foreign language. As Ecuador being a multicultural country the principle of plurilingualism recognizes the right for everybody to learn the target language without differencing the intercultural background or community of learners belong to in Ecuador. So, it does not matter if Ecuadorians already speak indigenous second languages such as Kichwa or Cha'palaa, they have the right to learn new languages (Ley de Educación Intercultural, 2011, p.10).

CHAPTER II:

MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Type of investigation

This research follows an explorative qualitative approach, as non-mensurable and specific information required to be analyzed. The research design was determined by this approach and techniques related to this approach were applied for the collection of data. The project observed a random selection of senior high school students from María Auxiliadora School in Esmeraldas during the academic year 2018 – 2019.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population was formed by 45 senior high school students of the 1st level Science “B” from María Auxiliadora School, and four English teachers. A random sample was selected, represented by 10 students of the class.

2.3 Operationalization of variables

Table 2

Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Dimensions	Indicators
(Dependent Variable) Pronunciation of Vowel Sounds	It is the articulation of vowel phonemes, which are influenced by the dialect of the target language.	It is how people pronounce words.	Pronunciation of vowel phonemes	/^/, /u:/, /o/ Speakers of difficulties of pronunciation -The practice of the language -Speech Production
(Independent Variable) Phonological Factor	It is the innate ability in the speakers' mind to develop phonological structures and categories according to their linguistic experiences.	It deals with the phonological principles to practice pronunciation.	Phonological Difficulties	-The correct use of English -The value of words -The fluency Teachers' strategies -Communicative activities -Feedback and Correction

2.4 Methods of Investigation

The methods used were analysis, to analyze the bibliography and the development of the students during the production of L2. Also, synthesis to synthesize the most important theories that may support this investigation.

For this project, a combination of synthesis and analysis was used in order to synthesize the most relevant information and analyzed the results after applying the techniques. To finally use the hermeneutics method for interpreting the information collected in the theoretical framework.

2.5 Research Techniques

- **Observation:** It was applied to 1st level senior high school students from Maria Auxiliadora School and to the correspondent English teacher. For developing this observation an observation sheet was used. The different aspects helped to identify phonological difficulties of EFL learners have and the inaccuracy on pronouncing vowel sounds.

This is a non-structured observation because an analysis of the participants was done. Thus, for this type of observation are taken as main components the participants, the objectives, the environment where the observation was done and the participants' behavior (Restrepo, 2008, p.123).

- **Interview:** An interview was applied to the English teachers of Maria Auxiliadora School. There were asked topics related to the importance of phonology in teaching, the phonological issues on EFL learners, and the teaching strategies and activities used with the students for improving the phonological factor development and the English vowel sounds pronunciation.
- **Focus Group:** This technique was used for exploring the situation and identified the common phonological difficulties while using the English language in lessons. It was applied to 10 students selected at random of the 1st level Science B from Maria

Auxiliadora School. Thus, students were provided with a reading for discussion and aspects such as giving comments and reading aloud were taken into account. Students had the opportunity to speak, and use the English language freely.

2.6 Instruments

- For the observation, a guide was used. It contained aspects such as: the students' use of the language, teachers' performance and feedback & correction, and students' difficulties on pronunciation. (Appendix A)
- For the interview, a question bank was followed and applied to the English teachers of Maria Auxiliadora School. They were 7 questions, related to the indicators to be taken into consideration for the analysis. (Appendix B)
- The difficulties in speech production of L2 learners were analyzed with a focus group using a guide. (Appendix C)

2.7 Data processing

The obtained information after the application of the different techniques, were analyzed and synthesized in the correspondent instruments used for collecting data. Those results are presented in a narrative way and using summary tables with the most relevant information.

CHAPTER III:

RESULTS

3.1 Observation

The observation's purpose was to identify the main phonological difficulties students may find while acquiring English as a foreign language, and it had two parts: a general observation dealing with the students' language use, the teacher's performance and feedback, the correction and the students' difficulties on pronunciation vowel sound. The second part was more specific, the phonological issues with rounded vowel sounds /u: /, /ʊ/ and with the semi-open back /ʌ/. Also, the common difficult with the /e/ sound when should not be pronounced in words with 's' as initial consonant, as well as the students' fluency by joining words (look at in Appendix A).

According to the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (2016) 67% of high school students use their mother tongue to express ideas and participate during the lesson (p.12), even though when the teacher asks for something in English students say the answer in Spanish. Most of the students do not have awareness on English fluency. It was observed that students tried to say sentences but it was difficult because they sound like they were spelling appallingly. Also, there is a lack of assimilation of words. In place of promoting the use of language in class, students frequently do other tasks and, consequently they are not clear about what to do.

A regular excuse for students' lack of use of the target language is justified by the absence of interest. When students used English, some phonological difficulties are highly remarkable, i.e. when they pronounce the /e/ sound when a word starts with "s". This is very common, for instance the word "school" pronounced as /'sku:l/ students add the /e/ sound at the beginning, as well as state: /estert/ in place of /'stert/.

Concerning the inaccurate pronunciation of vowel sounds, the /e/ sound in words with “s” at the beginning was an example. Currently, the main difficulty is when students use rounded vowels especially /ʌ/, /u:/, /ʊ/. Students pronounce the 12 vowel sounds in English as the regular a, e, i, o, u vowels in Spanish. For instance, the long close-back rounded /u:/ is pronounced as a regular u in Spanish. Most part of the time students pronounced words as they were written, there is any awareness to correct students’ vowels pronunciation, excepting for the vocabulary they are acquiring. Such as the word ‘book’, instead of being pronounced as /'bʊk/ with the near-close near-back rounded vowel, it was pronounced as /u/ and /o/.

The semi-open back no rounded vowel sound /ʌ/ is also pronounced as /u:/ (i.e. the verb cut (/kʌt/), students pronounced it /ku:t/). Or, when they should pronounce the sound /ʊ/ in could (/kʊd/), or should (/ʃʊd/) they pronounced them as they are written, /kould/ and /ʃould/. That might be a reason to students pronounce vowel sounds as Spanish “diphthongs”. An example of it: choose (/tʃuz/), which is pronounced as /tʃiu:s/ and the past tense chose (/tʃoʊz/) as /tʃos/. Also, an inaccurate pronunciation example is with the simple past tense of some verbs, i.e. read (/rɪd/) pronounced by students as /read/ in the present simple and (/rɛd/) the past simple tense is pronounced in the same way.

Table 3*Vowel Sounds Pronunciation and Phonological Difficulties*

Aspects	How should be pronounced	How it is pronounced
/ʌ/	/kʌt/	/ku:t/ or /kout/
/u: /	/'dʒu:n/	/dʒon/
/ʊ/	/'bʊk/	/'bu:k/ or even /'bɒk/
“/e/ sound”	/'steɪt/	/eɪteɪt/
“Diphthongs”	/kʊd/, /ʃʊd/, /tʃʊz/	/kould/, /ʃould/, /tʃos/
Simple Past Tense	/rɛd/	/rɪd/

Note. The /e/ sound produced is related to words with an s as initial consonant.

Finally, stress and assimilation were the main difficulties identified according to the use of the English language during the lessons. Students have difficulties on pronouncing words with an accurate stress, also they have difficulties on intonation while asking questions and saying sentences. As a consequence, it is complicated to they can understand each other so it is not possible to notice when they are asking something or when their speech involves statement. Similar with assimilation, students are not sure when using vocabulary because they do not feel sure about the pronunciation, in place of saying the word they write it first and then read it as it is written. Even though, the students' reading is not so accurate either, most of the time they expressed non-sense ideas.

3.2 Interview

The interview included 7 questions about phonology, teaching strategies and activities for improving pronunciation were answered. English teachers think that teaching phonology is very important because of communication and the advantages of a correct pronunciation of words English in terms of self-image and comprehensibility.

English teachers believe that teaching phonology is important for students' development, and they use several didactic resources and strategies, quantities of material to help students improve the English knowledge but for the phonological development they use the regular audio-lingual method. Listening and repeat activities, repetition for specific words of the vocabulary presented in one lesson and nevermore taken into consideration. An interview was conducted to four English teachers from the Maria Auxiliadora School, and only one remarked the use of pronunciation techniques (such as games like a Spelling Contest) focused on improving the student's phonological development. It is a great idea to get students involve during the lessons. Other teachers use dialogues, and oral testing to know the advance on students' pronunciation.

To overcome the phonological difficulties of students, teachers use cooperative learning, because this institution distributes students in large groups. That way, teachers know who is working and who is not. Also, teachers mention some elements the students use to improve the speech production. One of them is using the learned vocabulary, the correct word-order, the teachers' correctness and constantly speaking practice. In this institution,

teachers consider that it is better for students to start teaching speaking and, consequently, grammar.

3.3 Focus group

A focus group reunited 10 of 45 students selected at random which results demonstrated that students are afraid of committing mistakes. Before creating the focus group, the English teacher selected a random topic and lecture to students work according the recent vocabulary learned. In this way, the students were able to practice current knowledge they had. The purpose of forming the focus group was for students use the target language during a lesson, and identify the way students interact with the English teacher. The guide sheet for this technique was elaborated strategically to write what is observed according to the aspects, as it is possible to see in Appendix C. The identity of the students was changed in order to protect their privacy.

Table 4*Summary of the observations of English use in class.*

	Giving Comments	Reading Exercises	Speaking Activities	Reading Chorally	Sharing ideas
S 1	-	-	Doesn't speak.	-	-
S 2	Yes, appropriate ideas.	Good reading comprehension.	Speaks fluently.	Yes	Yes
S 3	Yes, always.	Good reading comprehension.	Needs to write the ideas first.	Yes	Yes
S 4	Barely participates.	Yes	Needs to write the ideas first.	Yes	Yes
S 5	-	-	Doesn't speak.	-	-
S 6	-	Yes	Needs to write the ideas first.	Yes	Yes
S 7	When is required.	Yes	Needs to write the ideas first.	Yes	-
S 8	Yes, always.	Good reading comprehension.	Speaks with no fluency.	Yes	Yes
S 9	When is required.	-	Needs to write the ideas first.	-	-
S 10	When is required.	-	Doesn't speak.	Yes	-

Note. Blank spaces mean absence of participation.

The aspects were five: giving comments, reading exercises, speaking activities participation, reading chorally and telling ideas. Most of the students did not provide comments about the topic, unless the teacher asked them to do so. However, there were some which participated actively during the entire lesson. As it was possible to supposed, most of the students did not read the paper when the teacher let to them 10 minutes before starting the activity until it was time to read it chorally. But that was not a problem, in fact, to read chorally help others to feel confident with their own reading. Speaking activities included pronunciation, expressing ideas, and understanding for translation. The last aspect should reflect how students express experiences they have had, or how they could relate the lecture with a real life situation.

After these results, the following concern involves English teachers. The awareness on practice pronunciation with all of the students was not noticeable, this is because the teacher started with a one by one lecture without correcting pronunciation. Reading exercises tend to be boring and the whole class do not always participate. The core idea of every reading was for students practicing how to join words and get better the fluency, and for obtaining this goal the teacher should work hard with feedback and correctness making learners faced pronunciation as they supposed to. Nevertheless, this focus group allowed to notice that the teacher's pronunciation is not as accurate as it should be, either.

CHAPTER IV:

DISCUSSION

Guzman & Martínez (2013) provided some strategies for helping students to improve the English pronunciation with the awareness of the Spanish interference. If we compare them with our results, there is a coincidence in the necessity of developing phonological strategies by focusing on an accurate pronunciation of vowel sounds. In María Auxiliadora School, English teachers do not feel an awareness on teaching accurate pronunciation. Errors are tolerated but there is not a constant correctness, and that might be for two main reasons. First, big classes. There are at least 45 students per classroom, and teaching pronunciation by listening and repeat activities does not provide the successful results. And, the second one might be students' low motivation on learning the English language.

The research by Guzman & Martinez is focused on developing strategies for pronunciation of consonants but vowels. The reason for this, it is that in Colombia where the investigation was done, according to the Ministry of Education in Colombia (2016) students have difficulties in pronouncing consonant sounds more than vowels, because of the program 'Colombia Bilingüe' where the Colombian syllabus presented is focused on students' needs aims to phonological difficulties relaying on consonant sounds, for this reason the thesis exposed activities for practicing the -ed ending because of being the most remarkable struggle.

EFL students belong to a society, thus they must interact with others and develop their linguistic competences. Following the Colombian studies, what is happening in Ecuador is similar, but there is any national program for covering students' needs while learning EFL. The Ministry of Education in Ecuador (2016) had implemented in the curricular design several activities and strategies for the English teaching taking into consideration the productive and receptive skills. Thus, the Ecuadorian government by hand with the English teachers are helping students to develop the phonological factor. Teachers must

use the material provided for impulse learners to improve EFL acquisition, specially the phonological development.

What do teachers from the Maria Auxiliadora School provide to improving students' pronunciation and avoid phonological difficulties? They help students by getting familiar with words by means of teaching vocabulary according the recent topics. Concerning on the interviews results done to English teachers, the use of minimal pairs in pronunciation activities was mentioned. Even though, according to what was identified during the 2 weeks of observation (4 lessons), teachers practice vocabulary without showing awareness for an accurate pronunciation.

Students do not feel motivated for learning English, they do not feel themselves into an English environment, and teaching with didactic material is worthless if students do not take the English practice seriously by using them. As a consequence, EFL learners and put less effort every time because they do not feel engaged to the class and an example was the focus group application, where from 10 students just 4 were interested for learning.

Tergujeff (2013) presented a booklet based on English teaching pronunciation, because as it was exposed learners' pronunciation is what reflects the knowledge of the target language and creates the first impression for the listener. This is known by English teachers from María Auxliadora School, according to the strategies for teaching pronunciation they use, such as the cooperative learning. With so big and large classes (more than 40 per classroom), the most important factors is to know how to arrange the class in order students can learn in a better way.

As of Ecuadorian studies, Tinoco (2017) exposed activities for practicing with EFL students improving an accurate pronunciation, but in a generalist manner. On the other hand, Olivo (2016) developed a descriptive research where the problems of an inaccurate pronunciation are exposed and there are similarities with our project, where the phonological difficulties on pronouncing vowels are being identified. In relation with the focus group, it is coincided a necessity of higher English proficiency levels in relation with pronunciation.

By means of phonological difficulties, the main factor could be the native language influence as Rúa (2018) highlighted, saying that the roots EFL learners have reflect the accuracy or inaccuracy English sounds pronunciation. In Esmeraldas, Ecuador, García (2016) hinted in the journal “El Comercio” a very possible difficulty that ‘esmeraldeños’ have for learning new languages, an African-based prosody in Spanish is also implicated for the pronunciation of other languages.

While diagnosing the origin of pronunciation errors is not the focus of this thesis, studies on Equatorial Guinean Spanish EFL learners reveals the African roots of the language by means of pronouncing vowels. For instance, /a/ being pronounced as a schwa /æ/ or as an /o/ (i.e. in place of pronouncing /bæd/, non-native learners pronounce /ba:d/) (Thompson and Lamboy, 2012, p.164). But, that is not uncommon according to Case (2012) when said that nonnative English speakers or EFL learners do not differentiate the short from the long vowel sounds. Also, something identified during the observations was the formation of English diphthongs where there was no need for using them or pronounce them. Thompson and Lamboy (2012) also presented that the influence of African roots provokes a falling diphthong for some words (p.164). Even though, that is not any barrier for communication, the learner should practice more to develop an accurate pronunciation according to the acquired phonological factor.

María Auxiliadora students require English teachers with a proficient English level, including all the basic skills knowledge. Teachers occasionally make students practice pronunciation during lessons, they know how to but apparently they do not look for, this is because of so many students per classroom. Teachers feel frustrated with big and multilevel classes. Even though, English teachers should have training on phonological skills because languages are in constant changes. The source of any improvements relies on training.

CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSIONS

- An inaccurate pronunciation and poor fluency can be considered as the main phonological issues that students of EFL deal with, concerning on their communicative competence. As teaching pronunciation has been regarded as one of the important aspects of phonology, English teachers must follow their intuition for teaching EFL without specific guidelines or specific material. Students tend to do it in the same way as the vowels in Spanish while pronouncing vowel sounds, by do not being aware that in English what it matters is the accurate pronunciation of the vowel sound.

The phonological factor development of EFL learners is low. According to the observation and the focus group results, students struggle on the use of English during lessons. As students have problems with assimilating sounds and utterances of the English language, Carrillo (2017) exposed that a person develops successfully the phonological factor while interacting with others, and working into an appropriate environment where should be able the practice.

- Lack of vocabulary is one of the phonological difficulties for EFL learners. According to the observations and interview to the English teachers, students have problems to comprehend the meaning of words by doing the sentence formation process complicated. Also, assimilation of utterances provokes students cannot identify the sounds while interacting during classes. Most of students are not aware on the fluency for speaking in English, that is a complication when they try to pronounce because they sound like they were spelling but saying the word.
- The L1 or mother tongue has been considered as the main phonological factor that leads in the inaccurately pronunciation of vowel sounds. Nevertheless, all depends on the guidelines and material or strategies English teachers use for helping EFL students overcome difficulties while pronouncing vowel sounds.

- Some teaching strategies followed in class by English teachers to improve students' pronunciation are: oral testing, presentations, role plays, and even spelling contests which are regarded exciting by the students. Teachers do not have a proper training for teaching pronunciation, but they perform as accurate as they can. As a response to the scarcity of native-like instructors or guidelines, there is a general agreement that extra training is required. Finally, teachers agreed on the use of technology and ICT training for helping both students and teachers to improve pronunciation, especially English vowel sounds.

CHAPTER VI:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As this research is based on problem analysis, it is advisable to keep a tracing on students' phonological difficulties. Longitudinal work would be an interesting line of research in order to determine whether these issues continue or if those have had a considerable diminution.
- Students should be evaluated while acquiring EFL, and according to the results make a new analysis about the process and advances. Phonological difficulties on pronunciation vowel sounds are common, especially for nonnative English speakers. It is important to avoid phonological difficulties in pronunciation to pay attention on the position of the mouth for producing the sound rather than the length of the sound. Sounds tend to be tricky, therefore the many confusions for EFL learners.
- Creating an English environment for English lessons might help students to feel comfortable and motivated for learning. Creativity and real-life examples using learned vocabulary would make easier the students' understanding topics. Teachers could develop their own didactic material for improving students' phonological factor, and the use of strategies such as dialogues, presentations, and debates, would help to improve the linguistic competences.
- English teachers' intentions for teaching pronunciation are acceptable, but it is pointless to someone teach something when has a low level about. English teachers should have training about specific English teaching, because they already know general strategies for teaching general English. What it must help in this case is an implementation of an English laboratory for practicing English for both, teachers and students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Observational Sheet

Objectives:

- To establish the main difficulties that senior high school students of EFL have to pronounce vowel sounds.
- To recognize the phonological factor which may lead senior high school students to pronounce vowel sounds inaccurately.

INDICATORS ASPECTS	YES	NO	OBSERVATIONS
			Aspects of pronunciation: a) /ʌ/, /u:/, /ʊ/ b) /e/ sound words with 's' as initial consonant c) join words/fluency
Students' Use of the Language			
Teachers' Performance/Feedback and Correction			
Students' Difficulties on Pronunciation of Vowel Sounds: /ʌ/, /u:/, /ʊ/			

Appendix B: Interview Format

Date:

Time and Place:

Interviewed Name:

General information about the interviewed: Name/ Age/ Gender/ Occupation

Objective:

- To identify the English teachers' strategies and material used for helping students improve the pronunciation of vowel sounds.

The interview will be applied to all the English teachers that belong to “María Auxiliadora” School, Esmeraldas. For the purpose of the investigation “The Phonological Factor in the Pronunciation of Vowel Sounds in the First Level Senior High School Students From “María Auxiliadora” School, 2018” teachers must answer questions related to phonology, difficulties of pronunciation on learners of English as a Foreign Language, strategies and activities to improve their students' speech production.

1. Do you think it is important to teach phonology to your students?
2. Which elements of phonetics have you tried in your English lessons?
3. Have you noticed any problems in your students, while pronouncing vowels? Which problems?
4. Do these problems have influenced in the development of accuracy/fluency while students are speaking?
5. How could you overcome these phonological difficulties of your students in classes?
6. Will you use any teaching strategy to overcome these difficulties?
7. Which are the elements students should use to improve their speech production?

Appendix C: Focus Group

Objective: To establish the main difficulties that senior high school students of EFL have to pronounce vowel sounds.

FOCUS GROUP: Students' Participation in English Lessons					
Aspects: Students:	Giving comments	Reading exercises	Speaking activities	Reading a set of sentences chorally	Telling about the news they have heard
S 1					
S 2					
S 3					
S 4					
S 5					
S 6					
S 7					
S 8					
S 9					
S 10					

