THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE STUDY GROUPS FOR PROMOTING PRONUNCIATION LEARNING

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RESUMEN

Este estudio de investigación informa sobre un proyecto cuyo objetivo principal fue implementar grupos de estudio colaborativo en cursos de pronunciación, en un programa de enseñanza de idiomas. Teniendo en cuenta que el aprendizaje colaborativo se ha considerado como una estrategia efectiva para la construcción del conocimiento dentro y fuera del aula; los grupos de estudio colaborativos (CSGs) fueron conformados como un mecanismo para mejorar la competencia fonológica del estudiante.

Este proyecto se llevó a cabo en un programa de enseñanza del inglés y los participantes fueron 40 estudiantes que conformaron 10 grupos de estudio colaborativo (CSGs). Estos estudiantes pertenecían a los grupos de pronunciación II. Los métodos implementados para recolectar información fueron entrevistas, diarios del investigador y registros reflexivos. Los resultados confirman que la inclusión de tareas para el aprendizaje colaborativo dentro del salón de clase alientan a los estudiantes a expresar sus opiniones además de discutir y negociar ideas con sus compañeros (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Además, los datos confirman la efectividad de los grupos de estudio para que los alumnos menos competentes se beneficien de compañeros con un nivel de conocimiento superior (Vygostky, 1978). De igual manera las habilidades pedagógicas fueron promovidas y fortalecidas a través de la experiencia del curso.
ABSTRACT

This research study reports on a project which main purpose was to implement collaborative study groups in pronunciation courses at a Language Teaching program. Considering that collaborative learning has been deemed as an effective strategy for the construction of knowledge in and outside the classroom, collaborative study groups (CSGs) were conformed as a mechanism to upgrade students' phonological competence.

The present research was carried out at a Language Teaching Program and the participants involved were 40 students that were part of 10 CSGs, they belonged to the courses of Pronunciation II. The methods implemented for collecting data were interviews, researchers' journals, and reflective logs. Results confirm that the inclusion of collaborative learning tasks encourage students to express their opinions, discuss and negotiate ideas with others (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Data also confirmed the effectiveness of CSGs inasmuch as less competent learners benefit from more skillful peers (Vygostky, 1978). On the other hand, pedagogical abilities were strengthened in the process and, finally, other language skills were promoted through the experience.
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David Pinilla
TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESUMEN ........................................................................................................................................i
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................................... iv
INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ........................................................................................................ 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................... 7
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................................................. 8
RELATED RESEARCHES .................................................................................................................... 16
METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................................... 18
  Type of study ................................................................................................................................. 18
  Context ........................................................................................................................................... 19
  Setting ............................................................................................................................................ 20
  Participants ...................................................................................................................................... 20
  Project procedure ......................................................................................................................... 21
  Researchers’ role ............................................................................................................................ 24
  Data analysis and data collection instruments ........................................................................... 24
  Data analysis ............................................................................................................................... 26
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ........................................................................................................... 28
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .......................................................................................................... 29
  Collaborative study groups (CSG) enhanced the pronunciation learning, and locate other skills emphasized in the processes of learning .......................................................... 29
  CSGs as a means of reflection and self-monitoring through the use of feedback ....................... 29
  Autonomy, responsibility, and commitment as social skills in CSGs that hindered the execution of the current project ......................................................................................... 33
  Students’ additional gaining regarding the strengthening of reading, listening and vocabulary
  skills ................................................................................................................................................ 40
PEDAGOGICAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS ........................................................................ 46
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .......................................................................................................... 48
CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................................... 49
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................... 50
APPENDIXES ................................................................................................................................. 58
INTRODUCTION

Even when often neglected in EFL classrooms, pronunciation is very relevant in the formation of any second language learning because the pronunciation may affect our capacity to communicate with other language users. Instructors and investigators were concerned with pronunciation since they had looked for effective strategies and approaches to strengthening this skill; this study describes the experience of participants after they have been exposed to the use of pronunciation learning strategies within a collaborative learning scenario.

In the first chapter of the study, the reasons why the research was conducted will be explained, specifically the need of valid strategies whose applications allow learners to control and monitor their learning process. Another reason to conduct this study was to promote the collaborative work; despite the fact that in the Colombian second language learning settings, there is a lack of students’ autonomy and commitment for this approach to be applied effectively.

In the second part of the study the topics in which this study was framed are explained which are pronunciation, pronunciation features, pronunciation in the EFL curriculum, pronunciation techniques, pronunciation strategies, pronunciation learning strategies (critical listening, transcription, annotation and rehearsing corrections aloud) and study groups (collaborative study group). All these definitions are compared by authors and authorities in the field of study in order to support or contrast ideas about the research project. Finally, current and similar projects are presented to support the idea of this study.

In the next section, the methodology applied in this research project is explained since this study was conducted as a descriptive case study, it required to report and describe in detail the whole experience of participants when implementing pronunciation learning strategies in a collaborative learning setting. This part of the study also explains the context, where the project was developed, the participants, why were they chosen, their characteristics in terms of age and the level of English proficiency they had, the data collection methods which were: reflective logs, interviews, and researcher’s journals. Finally, the data analysis explains the methods the researchers used in order to examine what was found in the study.
Additionally, the findings are explained in the following order, those findings aim to answer the two different research questions presented in the study which are what can be evidenced from the experience of promoting pronunciation skills through the implementation of collaborative study groups? And how does the integration of pronunciation learning strategies impact students' phonological competence? Those findings are also supported through a discussion with authors who support or disagree with the results found in the study.

To finish, the difficulties that emerged in the implementation of the current project are presented so that future research studies on this topic can be informed of those aspects that might influence the execution of a project. These limitations are related to time constraints, the lack of autonomy and commitment by some participants and, additionally the different English proficiency levels of each group.

At the end in the conclusion, it is presented the necessity to promote collaborative study groups to enhance the pronunciation, and also to foster autonomy and commitment in the project.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Communicative Approach states that the ultimate goal of language learning is communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996). In view of the need of unifying criteria in foreign language learning and teaching processes, the Council of Europe in 2001 designed the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) with the purpose of providing a coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language curricula, material design, and language assessment. This document covers several competences that are necessary in order to use a language for communication. The linguistic competence is, a significant skills that a language learner should develop when exposed to foreign language learning (i.e. lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic). What is more, this framework suggests a series of elements to be taken into account when dealing with the phonological competence, for instance, the sound units of the language, phonetic features, phonetic composition of words, sentence phonetics (stress, rhythm, and intonation), and phonetic reduction.

This phonological competence is so-called pronunciation and consists, among others, of the way sounds are produced in relation to rhythm, intonation, production of individual sounds, and production of chunks of sounds. As Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) suggest, there is a threshold in pronunciation for non-native speakers of English, and when they fall below this threshold, communication breakdowns start to appear no matter how good quality the command of grammar and vocabulary of the learners might be. Pronunciation, then, is related to intelligibility, a term that has gained importance in the last decades; a term that conveys that learners with good oral skills in English are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas (Morley, 1994; Fraser, 2000).

This subcomponent of the linguistic competence is an essential element for communicating successfully with others, as said by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996). However, in practice, English pronunciation can be one of the most complex skills to be developed “..because of the notoriously confusing nature of English spelling, it is particularly important to learn to
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

think of English pronunciation concerning phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet” (Roach, 2000). This means that pronunciation cannot be based on letters, but on independent sounds. Notwithstanding, pronunciation is not given the importance it deserves, for it has been “swept under the carpet” (Brown, 1991; Pronunciation Second Language Teaching Conference, 2014), which means that pronunciation has been given insufficient attention at a global and a local scale in the English Language Teaching scenarios. Considering this fact, many attempts have been made in order to integrate this competence in the language curriculum. However, this is rarely a matter of interest at a national level, proof of that is the low number of research studies conducted in this area, and the little focus that this skill has in the language classroom. (Gutierrez, 2005)

With reference to the problematic situation in terms of pronunciation, Gutiérrez (2005) considers that the little attention on Pronunciation is caused by different factors such as the number of students per classroom, the insufficient amount of tools for learning, the lack of motivation to learning. In addition, the author states that these factors affect the students' oral performance inasmuch as they are not be able to convey meaning due to the fact that their intelligibility is highly affected by pronunciation errors. Also, Bygate (1987: 1, cited by Gutierrez, 2005) affirms that “learners often need to be able to speak with confidence in order to carry out many of their most basic transactions. It is the skill by which they are most frequently judged”. This means that appropriate sound production is of highest importance when speakers want to interact with others in the target language, for they are being evaluated, somehow, by their interlocutors, and, also, the fact that pronunciation is one of the first factors detected when someone speaks.

In spite of the different attempts that have been made in view of integrating the pronunciation component into the English classroom, it is still “the cinderella skill” in the language classroom, as already mentioned. Pronunciation is, still, not given priority in language classroom and has a low visibility in the curriculum, fact that is attributed to the lack of teacher training, and the lack of inclusion of instruction on the use of strategies (Foote, Trofimovich, Collins & Urzua, 2013, Sardegna, 2012).

In response to the current situation in this field, studies have indicated and pinpointed a
number of strategies to approach and incorporate this skill in the curriculum. New trends in language teaching suggest and encourage English teachers to promote this skill in the EFL scenarios and, for this purpose a wide range of strategies have been proposed, which Peterson (2000) classifies based on Oxford’s (1990) model of strategy types; memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The importance of the implementation of these strategies lies in the fact that language learners need to become autonomous and conscious users of tools and actions in their learning process that will, eventually, allow them to gain control over the use of various aspects of pronunciation (Pawlak, 2010).

Current results from research on pronunciation learning and teaching have proved the efficiency of instructing learners on the use of learning strategies. Authors such as Ingels, (2011); Sardegna, (2012), Morley, (1991); among others, agree on the fact that the improvement of pronunciation skills centers on the application of certain strategies that allow learners to manage and administer their learning process. Research has also indicated the significant role that autonomy, self-regulation and self-assessment have in the development of phonological competences. However, there is a shortage of studies that identify ways of allowing language learners to take control of their own L2 pronunciation learning which are considered essential for accomplishing goals in contexts where the L2 is required (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010; W. B. Dickerson, 2000; Morley, 1991; and others).

Considering the number of aspects that influence adult L2 pronunciation acquisition, such as language aptitude, phonemic coding ability, developmental readiness, working memory (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Juffs & Rodriguez, 2007), motivation and amount of L2 exposure, instruction, and use (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) specific actions need to be undertaken in order to prompt learners to enhance their phonological abilities. Among these actions, collaborative study groups have been regarded as a meaningful tool, since research has proved collaborative work effective inasmuch as learners have the opportunity to express themselves, discuss their ideas, and find solutions towards specific problems (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). It has been found also that learning within a group helps students develop higher-order thinking skills such as: critical thinking, skills of self-reflection, co-construction of knowledge and meaning and problem
solving skills (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009; Moller, 1998).

The current study was designed to address gaps in research regarding the inclusion of specific actions that empower learners with tools for taking control of their own learning, in terms of pronunciation. Therefore, students from Pronunciation Course II were selected and their performance within the collaborative study group was assessed and analyzed, in view of determining the effectiveness of both the use of learning pronunciation strategies and, the integration of collaborative study groups in learning scenarios. All this targeted at reporting on the impact that the implementation of collaborative study groups had on a group of pronunciation students considering that there are no studies related to this aspect in the context where this research was carried out and with the main intention of covering the gap in research of the topic that was under study.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What can be evidenced from the experience of promoting pronunciation skills through the implementation of collaborative study groups?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Along this chapter, the main theories that are related to the range of the study will be determined and examined considering different authors’ perspectives and how these aspects have been accounted in other researches. In an attempt to articulate the different views and concerns stated by some authorities regarding pronunciation, this section is intended to present these concepts that serve as a foundation for the present and future studies.

This study was mainly elaborated within seven topics that account for the relevance of this research. Those topics are pronunciation, pronunciation features, pronunciation in the EFL curriculum, pronunciation techniques, pronunciation strategies, pronunciation learning strategies and study groups (collaborative study groups). The theory presented in this chapter mentions and describes pronunciation from the perspective of different authors in order to illustrate the most relevant theory and research around this notion; also, the features of this component will be described (segmental and suprasegmental); these features serve as a basis to teach and assess accurate pronunciation. Considering the importance of the topic, pronunciation in the EFL curriculum is also included to describe how language learners, instructors and EFL programs insert this skill in the language classroom. Equally, some techniques are pointed in this section in order to show the practices that have been recognized as appropriate and effective in terms of pronunciation learning and teaching. This section will also refer to some pronunciation learning strategies (critical listening, transcriptions and annotations, and rehearsing corrections aloud); since these were the strategies that learners apply during the execution of the current study, as well as study groups (collaborative study groups) which constituted the basic work unit under participants where framed.
Pronunciation

Pronunciation has been defined by Cook (1996) as a set of habits of producing sounds, the habit of producing a sound is acquired by repeating it over and over again and by being corrected when it is pronounced incorrectly. Other authors as (Morley, 1994; Fraser, 2000) consider that this skill is the way we speak that immediately conveys something about ourselves to the people around us. The same authors state that pronunciation is related to intelligibility because learners with good oral skills in English are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners whose pronunciation is difficult to understand will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect, such learners may avoid speaking in English, and thus experience social isolation, employment difficulties and limited opportunities for further study. Similarly, Labov & Wiliam (2003) proposed a more updated definition of pronunciation which the authors describe as the knowledge pertaining the different features of the target language phonological system, and the capacity for using them appropriately within the discourse.

Pronunciation features

The pronunciation skill has also been said to be the sum of many features that constitute the speech of language users, as stated by Crystal (2003) who differentiates among two main types of features, the segmental that the author defines as any discrete unit that can be identified, either physically or auditory, in the stream of speech, and the suprasegmental defined as phonemes that cannot be easily analyzed as distinct segments, but rather belong to a syllable or even word. Authors, such as (Ur, 2008; Kelly, 2000; Seferoglu, 2005) agree on that pronunciation comprises the sounds of a language or phonemes, stress, rhythm, and intonation. Even though the categorization of segmental and suprasegmental features is varied enough, the same authors claim that a broad definition of pronunciation includes both suprasegmental and segmental features, which are implanted in the instruction of the phonological competence. Theories conclude that segments are divided into phonemes, which are basic units of a language’s
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

phonology, combining them with other phonemes form meaningful units such as words or morphemes, phonemes also contain speech sounds known as consonants that are articulated with complete or partial closure of the vocal tract which are divided in voiced and unvoiced, vowels; are sounds in spoken language divided in single vowels (short and long) and diphthongs; that refer to two adjacent vowel sounds occurring within the same syllable. On the other hand, suprasegmental aspects involve intonation; defined as the variation of spoken pitch that is not used to distinguish words, instead it is used for a range of functions such as indicating the attitudes and emotions of the speaker, the stress; that refers to the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or to certain words in a phrase or sentence and aspects of connected speech; that is a continuous sequence of sounds establishing utterances or conversation in spoken language. This is one of the classifications for the suprasegmental features; other authors organize them in different ways but they coincide in the fact that these aspects go beyond the segmental features.

**Pronunciation in the EFL curriculum**

Due to the fact that accurate pronunciation deserves knowledge in second language phonology, in the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) (CEFR) section 5.2.1.4 is stipulated that in regard to pronunciation, the phonological competence involves a knowledge and skill in the perception and production of: the sound-units (phonemes) of the language and their realization in particular contexts, the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes (distinctive features, e.g. voicing, rounding, nasality), the phonetic composition of words (syllable structure, the sequence of phonemes, word stress, word tones), sentence phonetics (prosody), sentence stress and rhythm intonation.

Pronunciation has gained importance in the EFL curriculum in the last years; however, it is one of the skills that tend to be neglected in language classrooms. Fraser (2000) states that learners perceive pronunciation as one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, that
needs constant assistance and monitoring. By the same token, Underhill (2010) points out that in more recent years, there has been a gradual shift towards awareness of the importance of pronunciation prompting to refer to pronunciation as the “cinderella of language teaching”.

Other studies support the fact that pronunciation has been neglected in EFL scenarios. Studies as conducted by Breitkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) verify the existing exclusion of pronunciation in pedagogical learning, also the authors remark the lack of adequate instruction pertaining to this language aspect. The same authors surveyed 67 Canadian ESL programs; it was found that only 30% of teacher respondents had received pedagogical training in pronunciation. The authors concluded that quite a few of the teachers identified the need to integrate pronunciation into the communicative classroom to a larger extent, but most lacked the requisite knowledge and training to do so. Given the importance of pronunciation in the EFL curriculum, Arias (2009) accounted the most common errors that ESL learners commit at the moment of articulating sounds in English. The author shows how EFL learners tend to substitute the correct pronunciation of a phoneme for others that sounds similar. Those common errors are shown as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substituting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ʃ/  by  /tʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tʃ/  by  /ʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/  by  /s/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/θ/  by  /s/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ð/  by  /d/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/v/  by  /b/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/  by  /n/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/m/  by  /n/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʒ/  by  /ʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ/  by  /æ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ə/  by  any vowel, according to the spelling of the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɪ/  by  /i/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/U/  by  /u/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of the rigorousness that EFL learners might face in the process of pronunciation development, the researchers who have been interested in this field, have examined many variables in an attempt to explain the increase of accurate pronunciation. Studies have not been numerous, but have been productive, Vitanova & Miller (2002) have argued that learners can see improvement in both segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. However, once learners have mastered the basic sounds of English and identified some of the suprasegmental differences between their L1 and English, it is time to help them to learn some strategies so that language learners can study more effectively on their own.

In conclusion, it is of high relevance to bring to light what was mentioned in The Fifth Annual Pronunciation Conference in Second Language Learning and Teaching regarding this skill. In the event, the academic community concluded that pronunciation has been ignored or relegated in the EFL classroom, and this was the reason why the Annual Conference on Pronunciation Teaching and Learning emerged. Considering that this skill is not visible in the EFL curriculum, studies and reflections presented in the conference induce the academic community to focus and use applied approaches of pronunciation in the classroom, so that better results can be obtained in this phonological competence (e.g., Brodkey, 1972; Fayer & Krasinski, 1987; Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979).

**Pronunciation techniques**

Regarding pronunciation techniques and procedures to work on pronunciation, literature suggests the following strategies targeted at promoting the phonological competence. According to Bradley-Bennett (2007), one of the crucial elements to improve pronunciation is listening (as long as the recordings are understandable for learners and meaningful for their lives). This listening material should include different voices and ranges, for listening just to the teacher limits students from understanding other people. In the same line, Gilbert (2008) proposes dictation of sentences including the specific sounds which are being worked. The author
continues to say that linking words could be a proper way to work with final sounds. For example, “the boats entered the water: boatssssentered” (p.35).

Accordingly, Robertson (2003) estimates that in order to get students oral production sufficiently clear, the speed of speech could be reduced so as to achieve proper English production. In addition, he says that providing students with the script of the modeled pronunciation is suggested, but it should be gradually removed until the focus is completely on students’ word understanding. In the same fashion, Bradley-Bennett (2007) states that modeling syllables in a disjointed way (I… am… a… teach--er) or extending diphthongs (mah-ee neh-eem is...) could help students produce words accurately.

Consequently, Harmer (2011) suggests the use of other techniques for working on pronunciation such as identifying items from a list (listening a series of words and checking the ones which are included in the printed list), comparing minimal pairs (analyzing the difference between “day-they” not only in sound but in meaning), and using the phonetic symbols to clarify specific sounds. He also adds that these techniques might satisfy students who have different needs and attitudes towards pronunciation practice. Scholars like Cotterall, 2000; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Oxford, 1990 suggest that assisting learners to develop a repertoire of learning strategies is essential and recommend the inclusion of self-monitoring tools (self-correction) when learning pronunciation. One of these monitoring tools is suggested by Bradley-Bennett (2007), which is a “phone” made of PVC pipes joint together. The learner speaks to one of the ends of the phone and listens to his partner on the other end. The techniques and procedures presented are samples of what research and literature provide to the world of teaching pronunciation.
Pronunciation learning strategies (PLSs)

Considering the importance of pronunciation in the EFL many, approaches have proposed other meaningful learning practices as strategies for addressing pronunciation in the classroom. For instance, the communicative approach (Hinofotis & Bailey, 1980) stipulates that L2 learners are not expected to sound like native speakers of English but rather to enable them to surpass the beginning level; therefore their pronunciation will not affect their ability to communicate. Due to this fact, the same authors named some strategies that aid students working on language communicatively, namely, listening and imitation, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids, tongue twisters and developmental approximation drills.

Other authors have focused on the development of pronunciation learning strategies because of the rigorousness for developing accurate pronunciation; the goal of Pawlak (2010) as cited in the study conducted by Ingels (2011), is to develop a valid instrument for identifying PLSs use. The author provides useful definitions regarding the effectiveness of strategy use in the field of pronunciation; he states that pronunciation learning strategies are deliberate actions and thoughts that are consciously employed, often in logical sequence, for learning and gaining greater control over the use of various aspects of pronunciation. He highlights the fact that such strategy usage contributes to the development of declarative (explicit) and procedural (implicit) knowledge. Pawlak proposes some strategies for pronunciation learning, namely, critical listening, transcription, annotations and rehearsing corrections aloud. These strategies will be described, as follows:

Study groups as a means of promoting oral skills

Aside from pronunciation learning strategies, in literature, many authors have mentioned that other instructional practices and approaches should be contemplated for polishing the pronunciation skill. As an example, Brindley (2009) notes that work in study groups is highly
recommended to provide learning models, supportive learning environment and generous opportunities for participation. The same author also provides meaningful definition of study groups, describing them as a set of people who meet to study a particular subject and then report their findings, recommendations, or just to work on a subject matter that is labeled as part of learning activities; each group is unique and appeals on the backgrounds and abilities of its members to determine how the subject matter will be covered.

In the same fashion, Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke (2009) make emphasis on how study groups benefit of the inclusion of the collaborative approach, the authors state that while study groups serve as a meaningful tool for approaching a particular subject matter and to promote teamwork, collaborative study groups (CSG) are work units in which learners are expected to develop critical thinking skills, skills of self-reflection, and co-construction of knowledge and meaning. Similarly Gaytan & McEwen (2007) reported that collaboration in small groups has been particularly recognized as both advantageous and appreciated by students; besides it has been shown that small groups enable students to identify and correct misconceptions more easily and quickly and to improve understanding of the topics being studied. CSG, also, have been said to benefit English language learning in various aspects such as constructive peer interaction and active learning. As stated by Ovando, Combs & Collier (2006), who also highlight how beneficial is to deliver pronunciation instruction in a collaborative setting since it includes building communication and thinking skills, knowledge in language’s phonetic and phonological concepts that assist ELLs in correcting their pronunciation problems can be internalized with ease.
RELATED RESEARCHES

Research studies have been explored in order to see what literature says about pronunciation strategy use and related elements. Studies conducted in other parts of the world illustrate how language learners might have been affected by the employment of pronunciation learning strategies and other instructional practices. In the next paragraphs, some of these studies will be described.

Pronunciation learning strategies can result profitable for increasing accuracy in the production of pronunciation features, as shown in the study conducted by Ingels (2011). The researcher’s goal for this study was to extend our understanding of the role of strategy use in L2 pronunciation learning by investigating the effectiveness of training future international teaching assistants (ITAs) to critically listen to, transcribe, mark corrections (annotate), and orally rehearse English suprasegmental features in their own speech. For this purpose fifteen graduate-level learners of English (14 Mandarin speakers, 1 Korean speaker) from an English as a Second Language (ESL) pronunciation class at a Midwestern university were asked to participate in a repeated-measures design, in which participants had to use in combination strategies of critical listening, transcription, annotation and rehearsal. Speech data resulting from strategy use were gathered at the beginning and end of a 16-week semester in order to determine the extent to which strategy use corresponded to improved suprasegmental accuracy. The author found that all participants accomplished meaningful advances in the suprasegmental aspects of the language, specially stress and connected speech. Thus, concluding that to train learners to use PLS such as critical listening, transcription and rehearsing correction aloud proved to be effective to increase pronunciation accuracy. Besides, this study provided the first empirical evidence for the practicality of the annotation phase as a strategy for further boosting pronunciation accuracy.

On the other hand, other researchers have addressed pronunciation in their studies and whether it can be positively impacted by different learning scenarios and approaches. As an example Goswami and Chen (2008) examined whether collaborative learning structures make a
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

significant impact on ELL subjects’ overall pronunciation of target English sounds. The study enrolled 44 English language learners from a high school in Mexico, who ranged in age from fifteen to nineteen years old; all students’ native language was Spanish, as spoken in Mexico, and they all performed at similar levels of English fluency, as determined by the school’s criteria. Participants were divided into two groups, one of 25 students that received instruction in a conventional classroom setting, and other consisting of 19 students, received instruction on CSG whose instruction included collaborative learning elements such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction and group processing. Instructions regarding features of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) such as places of articulation and manners of articulation were also presented to this group in a collaborative learning structure. To collect the data, researchers administered a pre-test of the pronunciation of the target sounds to all the participants in both the collaborative and conventional study groups. After all the phonetic features of the target sounds were presented in the phonetic and phonological instruction, a post-test was given to both groups in the identical format as in the pre-test. Subjects’ phonetic realizations of the target consonants were audio taped and video recorded during both tests for assessment purposes. The researchers concluded that phonetic and phonological instruction did significantly improve subjects’ pronunciation of target English sounds in both the collaborative and the conventional study groups, and both groups obtained statistically significant improvement over the period of the study. However, the difference in progress between these two groups was not statistically significant. Thus, investigators concluded that for collaborative learning structures to be successfully implemented in ESL classrooms, the essential elements of CSG need to be present for a successful outcome. Positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills and group processing need to be built in the instructional format and materials creatively and effectively. Next, adequate time for instruction and “fermentation” of collaborative learning elements is definitely needed for the implementation of collaborative learning structures.
METHODOLOGY

This section of the research study contains different components which were relevant to the design of the study. Initially, this study was conducted as a case study under the parameters of two types of study which were qualitative and descriptive research. The following information here appearing illustrates the type of study, the context, the setting, the participants, the researcher’s role, the data analysis and data collection instruments, and the ethical considerations.

Type of study

With regard to the research design, this study can be classified within the qualitative approaches for the most part as this study is structured as an interpretive-descriptive research (IDR) case study, which has become a mainstream in fields of education which methods rely on linguistic rather than numerical data (Elliot, 1999). Applied disciplines have adopted interpretive description methods since their purpose is to supply a coherent conceptual description of particular patterns and cohesions that characterizes certain phenomena.

When describing the type of study developed, it is necessary to mention first that it was conducted as a case study due to the fact that it referred to an intensive description and analysis of a single phenomenon experienced with a very specific set of students as claimed by Merriam (1988). She stated that case studies, especially qualitative ones, are commonly implemented in the field of education as they provide real-life encounters with the phenomenon under study. As mentioned above, other characteristic of the design of this study is its qualitative nature. This project was developed as a qualitative study since the results acquired during the process were highly aligned to it. The core of a qualitative study is the interpretation of phenomena evidenced; it is also emphasized on subjectivity as it mostly starts by identifying, following and describing an event that has been not addressed before, or it has, but from a different approach therefore the researcher needed to narrate from a subjective perspective how the research was conducted and
what results were obtained.

Also, according to Cassell and Simon (1998) qualitative studies are concerned with phenomena taking place in real settings regarding behavior resulting in experience, and inevitably their orientation is towards a process rather than an outcome.

The research study developed was as well as descriptive study. Throughout this study the information was collected without altering the environment, which means that no data were compromised or influenced. The fact that this study was descriptive indicates that it provided information about behavior, attitudes and other characteristics of a particular group. Descriptive research involves collecting data which describe events and then “organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection”. Descriptive studies have an important role in educational research, for they describe natural educational phenomena that can interest policy makers and educators (Nelson & McLellan, 2001). In this instance, the descriptive study involved high interaction with the participants, which in turn demanded also interviews to collect necessary information.

To conclude, the study focused its attention on data gathered from the participants throughout the process. This case study was highly descriptive and its path relied on different data sources that were triangulated in order to verify that the data analysis was coherent.

Context

This study took place at a public university located in La Julita, Pereira (Risaralda). The university is an official entity which was created in accordance with Law 41 of 15 December 1958. The founder and the first principal of the university was Jorge Roa. The university opened its doors for the first time on March 4th 1961 having only one undergraduate degree of Electrical Engineering. As the years went by, the institution started to offer new programs, being one of them the English language degree provided by the Fine Arts faculty.
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

The Bachelor’s degree in English language is an academic program that responds to the need to professionalize teachers capable of enhancing education in the region in learning English as a foreign language covering as one of its main aims to train professional students in the field of English language from an overall perspective to perform teaching, research and social outreach activities.

**Setting**

The English language degree program began to function on the first term of 2004 with a current average of around 680 students as of the end of 2012. The English language degree program is divided in 10 semesters or terms of 6 months each. During the first 2 terms learners from the program take the subjects of pronunciation 1 and 2. The course that was chosen for the development of the study was pronunciation 2 which offers 3 hours of in-class work per week and allows students 3 credits towards this degree.

The teacher in charge of the course is a professor who has a Bachelor’s degree in English language teaching and a Master’s degree in English didactics from Universidad de Caldas. Each pronunciation course has an average of 25 to 30 students.

**Participants**

As mentioned above, the participants who were part of the study were native Spanish speakers, also students from the English language degree program. Their average English language level ranged from A1 to A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is a guideline designed to describe the achievement of language learners. Language learners classified in levels A1 and A2 are known as basic users. These participants were assigned into groups of four called collaborative study groups; the actual amount of students that participated in the group was approximately forty students divided in ten
groups of four students each.

The teacher in charge of the class guided the students giving them all the needed information and instruction on how learning strategies had to be implemented and used by the learners autonomously. As a token of appreciation and motivation for being part of the study, the teacher made clear ahead of time that a 20 percent of the final grade was to be graded at the completion of the actual assignment.

**Project procedure**

In order to implement pronunciation learning strategies, the study groups met on a weekly basis. A reading was previously assigned to each group with the purpose of giving the learners the opportunity to read it before gathering in the group session. Each group assigned four different roles to the members: Word collector, Sound dealer, Critical listener and Analytical reader. After assigning roles, each participant’s task was to prepare an activity that would assist him/her in the execution of the role. It is important to highlight that the principle considered for the design of the activity is cooperative learning tasks such as circle sage.

To commence, the word collector was in charge of creating a task that would foster the learning of the vocabulary found in the reading assigned. Additionally, the sound dealer led the group in the practice of pronunciation through tasks such as phonetic transcriptions, minimal pairs, repetition drills, filling the gaps, among others, while the critical listener managed to plan listening activities that were connected to the text in question (give examples of activities). To finish, the Analytical reader was expected to prepare tasks that would explore the reading content through comprehension activities. The rubric which the group had available for every meeting was the one below:
Designed based on model by Arias (2011).

Once the learners got together in the collaborative groups, each member shared the task they had brought to the encounter and this session was known as *Circle sage*. It is important to mention that most of the sessions were recorded in view to analyze after the interventions during the following session also known as the *Error Analysis Session*. The purpose of the latter was to analyze the mistakes seen during the first session. The error analysis rubric was the instrument used in order to study such mistakes:
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

Designed based on model by Arias (2011).

The rubric above was designed taking into account the in-service course teacher’s insights based on years of experience and also some of the most common pronunciation mistakes made by language learners exposed by Arias (2011). Since all the participants shared the same mother tongue which was Spanish, and also they have an average language level of A1 and A2, the rubric is very accurate when it examines the most common substitution mistakes.
Researchers’ role

The researchers that were part of the study assumed the role of observers as participants. Such role granted that the researchers/observers activities were known to the group in which the study took place. By the means of this, method researchers had access to the group selected and a great deal of data relevant to them and the study. The researchers maintained a role in a very natural setting under observation by immersing themselves in such setting under study to understand key factors and experience events as suggested by Macionis, Plummer (2008).

At the first phases of the process, the researchers limited their role to only observation with little intervention with the intention of later on become participants too at the last phase, which consisted of rehearsing corrections aloud. Then, by the end of the study when researchers analyzed the outcome of the participants after following the process indicated, they compared it to the very first products achieved by them.

Data analysis and data collection instruments

The instruments used by the researchers to gather the data were: researchers’ journals, observations, reflective logs, error analysis rubric, and interviews. Throughout the implementation of the collaborative study groups, the researchers used journals to collect data and by the end of the process some participants were interviewed, which provided a great deal of information.

Researchers’ journal

Due to the role played by the researchers during the implementation of the CSG, it became necessary for them to keep journals while on the field. Researchers’ journals are also known as analytic memos or reflective writing. During this project, the researchers attended most of the sessions when the participants met to carry out the activities assigned to observe closely
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

each event that took place. Through these journals, they documented and followed the participants’ performance and participation during the CSG sessions. Borg (2001) specified in his paper that researcher’s journals are a form of reflective writing, which researchers engage in during a project and through which they document their personal experience of the research process. (See appendix 1).

**Interviews**

The interviews were applied by the end of the process that each participant followed in the collaborative study groups. After being exposed to metacognitive learning strategies, the participants had different insights about pronunciation than the ones they had at the earliest stages of this project. The researchers decided to interview some of the participants in order to widen the information obtained during the implementation of the CSG. As indicated by Dick, (2002) interviews are considered a systematic method of collecting data from individuals through conversations where the subjects are the primary source of information for the study. By means of an interview, the participants are provided with the opportunity of getting involved in the process and talk about their insights, which can be enriching in regards to their perceptions and interpretations of the given situation. Some of the reasons why it was decided to choose the interview as a data collection instrument in this study were first because they allowed conquering personalized data and second because by asking open questions in a semi structured interview there was room for examination, and consequently valued information was obtained. (See appendix 2).

**Reflective logs**

According to Fish and Twinn, (1997) reflective logs are “systematic, critical and creative thinking about action with the intention of understanding its roots and processes” (p.172). These instruments are useful in this research study since they provide a careful consideration, thought
and opinion, which lead to a desired result. Also, the researchers implemented these artifacts in order to know the participants strengths and the weaknesses in the learning process. At the same time, this is a way to reflect about which strategies the researchers can implement to improve pronunciation skills. (See appendix 3).

Data analysis

Once data was collected, the process of analyzing began. This process was conducted taking into consideration the grounded theory mentioned by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This systematic methodology, which allows researchers to discover theory through the analysis of data, shows four stages of analysis. The first step is data collection, through a variety of methods. In the case of this study, interviews and researcher’s journals were implemented as data collection instruments as well as reflective logs. From the data collected, relevant information for concept creation was marked with codes. The codes then were grouped into similar concepts in order to ease their analysis. These concepts were used to form categories, which became the foundation to create theory. Once theory emerged it was contrasted and compared with related literature.

Information was triangulated per method, and through a process of disassembling and reassembling data (Denzin, 1978) relationships were detected and put together for further interpretation.

The codes used were as follows: I: interview, JE: journal entry, Q: question, RL: reflective log, W: week, R: reflection, G: group, #: amount or order of questions, A: artifact, and S: student. Some examples of the coding system are presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I8Q2</td>
<td>This code indicates that the piece of data was taken from an interview, the number 8 indicates the number of the interview, and Q2 makes reference to question number 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLG2W2R3</td>
<td>This code was taken from a reflective log applied in group 2 during the second week and it was the reflection number 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here it can be seen a journal entry number 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This code entails that the data was taken from the group number 5, during week number 1, reflection number 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>This code stands for an artifact from student number 2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current research was adjusted in order to complete the research in a precise way. Some parts were noted from the beginning to clarify the credibility of the study. The first aspect was to notify the participants that they would be part of a project, and asked them if they wanted to participate in the study. The second aspect was to inform them about the nature of the project and their role in the research; additionally, in order to protect the integrity of the participants involved in the study, pseudonyms and codes were used with the purpose to reserve the real identity during the stage of the collection of data and information analysis. The third aspect was related to the procedure in which the researchers not only had the role as observers, but also they had the role as supporting the learning in view of the fact that they provided assistance in the execution phase by clarifying the emerging doubts of the participants. Finally, once the researchers had the results, the participants were informed as part of the project, to make them aware of the performance in the research in which they were involved.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this section, the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of findings will be presented and illustrated as objectively as possible, by showing evidence from the different instruments and perspectives included in this study. After the process of data analysis, the study revealed relevant issues concerning the implementation of CSGs for developing pronunciation skills. These issues will be described, discussed and exemplified in detail in this section.

Collaborative study groups (CSG) enhanced the pronunciation learning, and locate other skills emphasized in the processes of learning

Collaborative study groups were a component of this project since the researchers intended to describe the impact of collaborative work outside the classroom as a mechanism to help the learners benefit from their more skillful peers. The results revealed important aspects concerning the implementation of CSGs in learning processes; namely, the benefits, and the challenges encountered in the course of the project.

CSGs as a means of reflection and self-monitoring through the use of feedback

During the development of the project, it was noticed that the implementation of study groups supported the process of learning in other scenarios different from the ones provided in the classroom; specially, for practicing pronunciation and the learning of new vocabulary. Data shed light on the fact that CSGs provided students with new opportunities to conduct metacognitive processes, which enable participants to reflect on their own conscious mental activities such as thinking, understanding, learning, and remembering. Given that students monitored themselves and others by means of observation and interactive exercises; the participants practiced and learned outside the classroom since they were supported by the ones that were more competent in the English language.
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

The following excerpt, taken from an interview, confirms what is being described in this finding. The student was inquired about the experience of being part of the pronunciation project.

I2Q1B1:
“Me gustó muchísimo porque aprendí mucho trabajar en equipo y eso me ayudó, hizo que pudiera aprender de mis errores y ayudar a corregir los errores de mis amigos, para mí fue muy constructiva la experiencia.”

Based on the students’ perceptions, collaborative work contributed to the process of reflection and self-monitoring of mistakes. Also, data lead us to believe that the learning process of some participants had a positive effect because it can be perceived as useful tools for monitoring themselves and using strategies for supporting their metacognitive processes.

Student’s comment reveals that the exposure to CSGs might have promoted pronunciation practice and learning. The excerpt evidences that the student had the chance to analyze his own and their peers’ speech with the purpose of correcting those constant mispronunciations that sometimes affected communication. His perceptions can be attributed to the teamwork that facilitated these practices and offered new environments.

Another excerpt, taken from a reflective log, shows that the implementation of CSGs empowered the learners with different opportunities for strengthening their pronunciation skills and learning from others. The participants were asked to complete a reflective chart in which they had to reflect about what went well in each lesson.

RLG2W2R3:
“El mismo feedback que le dan los compañeros a uno, los que van más avanzados, uno aprende de los errores de pronunciación… tan consciente entonces es lo que uno más aprende de los mismos conocimientos de los compañeros.”

Data suggest that the contributions of the teamwork provide situations in which the participants shape their pronunciation weaknesses, all of which let them to assist their process
individually. The teamwork corrected mistakes and facilitated opportunities of nurturing from others feedback in view of the fact that the participants of the project negotiated meaning and learning that facilitated the comprehension of the studied topics in class. The results of this study indicate that the members of CSGs benefitted from this experience when they provided feedback of their pronunciation mistakes, and evidence of this, is that students who had a low level of English were monitored by the learners who were more skillful in terms of pronunciation. Thereby, it was revealed that the more competent users contributed significantly to the process on the grounds that the other members of the group learnt from the given feedback, no matter that this feedback was not targeted at them.

It can be interpreted from this excerpt taken from a researcher's journal that the participants applied a self-monitoring strategy during the study. They followed their process in a conscious way on account of the fact that it helped them to assess whether problems were being overcome, or whether new problems were emerging. In every session, the researchers acted in accordance with the learners’ performances.

JE03:

“Se percibe a la participante Luisa el interés por mejorar su pronunciación y aprender nuevo vocabulario. Algo que me ha parecido interesante, es el registro de sesiones que ella está llevando, en dicho registro ha evidenciado que por medio de una lista, ella señala los ítems a mejorar y que ha mejorado.”

It is interesting to notice that the participant implemented her own strategy for self-monitoring, which evidences her autonomy since the analysis she did was not a requirement in the project. Those issues led her to figure out the type of mistakes she had during the ongoing project by self-monitoring her own process and progress. When the participant mentions that she is keeping a record of the mistakes she used to make and the ones that she has overcome is clear that she is applying a strategy for enhancing her phonological competence.

This finding is aligned to what Lenski & Niersfheimer (2002) stated when they refer to the benefits that study groups have in learning. They say that while the students are exposed to
the language, the opportunities to have a meaningful feedback are key to developing learning, as it was observed in the research, considering that the feedback given by the more competent users of the language contributed to scaffold pronunciation learning. Additionally, Ellis (2001) reported some positive aspects of collaborative work; among them, the author made emphasis on the availability of other students to provide feedback as well as access to peer knowledge. Hence, both theory and evidence complement each other to indicate the importance of feedback as a main tool of learning within the collaborative work.

Furthermore, the previous statement is connected with Chen’s study (2011), who delivered pronunciation instruction through collaborative study groups. The investigator found that pronunciation instruction within collaborative scenarios engaged learners in positive interdependence and face-to-face interaction that resulted in participants’ acquisition of knowledge of the meaningful differences in the units of the sound system which according to the author contributed to their capacity to monitor and strengthen their pronunciation.

As a conclusion, findings confirmed what the authors said in terms of cooperation this type of experience empowered the learners with specific strategies for the construction of knowledge in terms of phonological control. This segment provided several mechanisms for the construction of knowledge, such as feedback, reflection, and self-monitoring; for instance, the more input and output they produce the more chances they have to reflect on their learning experience.
Autonomy, responsibility, and commitment as social skills in CSGs that hindered the execution of the current project

This research displayed information related to other skills that were regarded as personal characteristics, such as autonomy, responsibility, and compromise. One factor that affected the project was the lack of autonomy that some students showed since it was noticed that a closer supervision was needed in order to guide the students’ process in the development of the activities they had to design and perform. The second factor that affected the study was the absence of responsibility and the lack of compromise of some participants as it was observed in the reflections and in the assignment of the roles for the study groups.

The following excerpt, taken from a participant’s interview supports what is being discussed about the lack of autonomy in the development of the activities. The participants were asked to give some recommendations for future projects.

*I5Q3B:*

“*Recomendaciones, si es alguien que va usar ese método podría usarlo en el salón de clase sea que no puede que lo hagamos por fuera sino que sea ya obligación hacerlo en el salón de clase o no obligación o sea que se vea como una tarea que cada grupo se reúna y que el profesor esté supervisando para que la gente pues lo tome en serio, porque si lo hace por fuera el que quiera va y el que no no y así.***”

*I2Q3C*

“*los compañeros hacen el trabajo pero no lo hacen a conciencia sino como por la nota, por cumplir.***”

Data suggest that the lack of autonomy was considered as a detrimental factor in the process since some participants required the presence of a monitor who guided them in the development of the activity and to guarantee the team’s attendance to the meetings. In other aspects, some students did not feel confident with the partners’ commitment. It was completely necessary the guidance of an expert who might be a student from upper levels or the teacher.
Consequently, these attitudes were decisive and very influential in the execution of the project, these factors affected the results of some participants’ learning experiences, given that not all the members were committed towards the activity.

The fact that the students state that the CSG should be monitored by a teacher evidences that they just will be more engaged and responsible when they are being supervised or they are graded at the end of a task. The afore pieces of evidence suggest that some participants of the CSGs did not count with the characteristics of an autonomous learner which is a key trait that the members should have. Participants seem not to be used to being exposed to this type of practices outside the classroom and complain about the fact of being conducting a project which no teaching monitoring was perceived. In regard to this, the teacher’s role consisted of the guidance of the process through the error analysis rubrics and some general feedback sessions in the classroom. In relation to this, Fenner and Newby (2000) clarify that autonomy in foreign language is more than an attitude; it is established on the belief that all learning is individual; for that reason, the learners should be willing to spend some extra time performing some tasks that help them improve their knowledge. Based on the authors’ assertions, for this type of learning experiences, it is necessary that students demonstrate interest in learning by themselves outside the classroom, performing activities which they enjoy, but also exercises that reinforce the topics which they learnt in class.

The following excerpt taken from a researchers’ journal revealed that the learners were not aware of the importance of the project. This was an analysis from the whole product that was the portfolios that each group had to complete.
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No.</th>
<th>Meeting duration</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>6/1001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ROLE** | **STRENGTHS** | **RECOMMENDATIONS**
---|---|---
Word collector | Uso de una herramienta diferente como lo es la dictado en grupo. | Nos colores |
Sound dealer | Cuando realizamos la actividad nos indicó que nos articulamos de los sonidos. | Nos colores |
Inquisitor | No vino | |
Analytical reader | Aquí, se repite una oveja Vaca muy didáctica. | |

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No.</th>
<th>Meeting duration</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 min</td>
<td>9/31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ROLE** | **STRENGTHS** | **RECOMMENDATIONS**
---|---|---
Word collector | Cada vez incrementa el vocabulario | Leer más artículos en inglés para así seguir incrementando el vocabulario |
Sound dealer | Trabajó la parte de los verbos en pasado algo que ayudó al grupo en la pronunciación. | Seguir trabajando la pronunciación |
Inquisitor | ? | |
Analytical reader | ? | |

**What did you learn in this session?**
 disproportionately to some of us. Wow.
As we can observe, according to the facilitator who was monitoring the participants through the process, the formats above are not well and fully completed, and evidenced that some activities proposed in some groups were not very innovative and were not varied in terms of design; therefore, it led us to notice that the participants were not conscious of the importance of the execution of the project, they considered it as a requirement for approving the pronunciation course rather than a learning strategy. Also, the responses included in the rubrics evidenced the absence of criticality given the fact that comments contained superficial reflections that were done without much reflection; participants' comments such as: use more colors in the activities, improve the handwriting, or keep working in pronunciation without making specific suggestions, corroborated the participants' attitudes such as autonomy, responsibility, and compromise towards the implemented project. In brief, the results suggest that this fact played an important role in the path of the project given that there are decisive factors that directly influence the accomplishment of the project.

The following excerpts taken from participant’s interviews support what is being discussed about the lack of compromise and interest in the development of the activities. The participants were asked to give some recommendations for future projects and mention their
feelings towards the experience of being involved in CSGs.

I8Q1.6P1
“la puntualidad, en general me pareció que había una falta de responsabilidad por parte de algunos compañeros”

I5Q3B
“Lo malo fue que no había como esa responsabilidad de encontrarnos de sentarnos a leer juntos, de darnos como el feedback a cada uno, sino que lo hacíamos cuando llenábamos las rubrics era como uno consideraba ahí como por llenar no porque de verdad eso hubiese sucedido.

Data show that some participants were not responsible in the development of the project since they did not follow the steps and procedures of the activities, and even more, they were completing the formats just as a requirement, not because they were engaged in a deep reflection of what they did well or what they did not do that well during the sessions. Also, the non-attendance to the meetings affected the evolution of the project, and this was exposed in the reflective logs, given that some of the roles were not completed by the absent participants. This fact illustrates the lack of commitment and interest of some of the members of the teams seems they did not attend the sessions and hinder the evolution of CSGs. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that there were some groups that demonstrated a great sense of compromise, and responsibility, features that led them accomplish better results in terms of personal and academic level. According to the professor in charge of the course and researchers, the students who were autonomous and responsible, were those who evidenced meaningful advances in the process. Even though, there was not a specific instrument that carried out data, the professor of the course mentioned this as a gaining of this experience.

In the same line of what has been listed, Harmer (2009) establishes that responsibility of learning is also about encouraging learners to take more concern about their own learning, and it is not only the teacher’s role to provide all the resources for learning because the students should be the ones who propose and control their competence development. With reference to this, the
collaborative study groups that could result in meaningful learning considering that another learning environment could provide a more friendly setting for the students to learn and reduce the affective filter that sometimes could be more present in the classroom. The project was designed on the grounds that CSGs believe in assigning responsibilities to its members, with the purpose of promoting students’ autonomy and independence. Hence, findings are not aligned to what is expected from study groups (Brindley, 2009) because a number of variables should have been controlled, which misrepresents the idea of a CSGs since the members of CSGs are expected to be responsible of their learning tasks; however, results suggest that some of the participants did not succeed in the process because they lack the main characteristics of the members of CSGs.

This last excerpt taken from a reflective log evidenced what is being reported in this finding.

G5W1R3:
“La gran recomendación es que falta más compromiso, algunos están comprometidos con el proyecto y otros les falta interés; los compañeros hacen el trabajo pero no lo hacen a conciencia sino como para la nota, por cumplir.”

I5Q3A
“El proyecto lo hacíamos mas como por una obligación no porque de verdad nos estuviéramos enriqueciendo en el idioma”

Data reveal that some CSGs conducted the project superficially in view of the fact that they did not go in depth; they just duplicated the same type of activities and comments. The participant’s attitudes indicate that some of them did not want to be part of the CSGs since some of them did not show up to the meetings as well as they sometimes did not prepare their tasks. Some others felt comfortable with the study groups they were working with, and the students were not committed enough with the process. Students seem to have been more interested on the grade of the final work rather than on the benefits that this project could have brought to them.

In agreement to this finding, Bellamy (1999), considers that compromise emerges from
personal values, and it is important compromising one’s principles and oneself. In this study, the lack of compromise was apparent as a negative feature in the CSGs since the performances were not satisfactory, and it was evidenced in the design of the activities that were not innovative and were fairly repetitive.

To conclude this finding, a CSG must have certain characteristics to make the project work. Cayuso, E.; Fegan, C., & Mcalister, D. (2004) state some characteristics that were key to the development of their research. Firstly, CSGs must embed the learners in their own learning allowing them to play a large role in their own professional development. Secondly, having a set of CSGs ground rules or parameters let the participants know the group’s expectations for behavior and learning; these ground rules are: be on time in the meetings, be willing to contribute to the discussion, complete the readings for the meeting date, and be respectful of all group members, all of which belong to a responsible learner.
Students’ additional gaining regarding the strengthening of reading, listening and vocabulary skills.

By the end of the project, the researchers became interested in knowing what the students considered they had learned throughout the implementation of CSGs. Other than practicing their pronunciation, learners were encouraged to reflect on what they thought to have gained in this academic experience. The reason why they are counted as additional gaining is because the project was intended to promote the practice of pronunciation, but the means used to achieve it impacted the participants on other areas of their development. In this section, each skill will be explored and samples taken from the different data collection instruments will support the additional gaining reported by the participants.

On account of the means used to carry out the sessions in the CSGs, language skills such as reading, listening and vocabulary were strengthened. Through the reading of a book chosen by the learners, different activities regarding listening and vocabulary were explored. By reading their weekly assigned portion of the book of their choosing among the options provided by the teacher, the participants were exposed to a reading process that facilitated them to explore the content scene at a deeper level as they were expected to design tasks, which required analytical comprehension as well as pedagogical understanding. Reading texts in the target language outside the classroom represents a challenge for some language learners, but many of them claimed to have learned from this habit.

The following excerpt, taken from an interview, confirms what is being described in this finding. The student was inquired about the experience of being part of the pronunciation project.

I8Q1.4P2

“la experiencia de haber participado en los grupos de estudio fue fructífera debido a que como las lecturas fueron constantes entonces tuvimos mucha practica en esto y pues uno ya al leer en una segunda lengua uno comienza a ser consciente de lo que está leyendo y además cuando uno profundiza en las lecturas le coloca más atención y como se debe pronunciar”
The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

Data revealed that many learners felt that the experience of reading was rewarding in view of the fact that they were in constant interaction with readings, and they had the opportunity to retain and be aware of the information; besides, the information they acquired helped them to participate, share ideas, and discuss about others’ opinions related with the readings in the meetings.

Another excerpt, taken from a reflective log, shows that the implementation of CSGs empowered the learners with different opportunities for strengthening other language skills apart from pronunciation. The participants were asked to complete a reflective chart in which they had to reflect about what went well in each lesson.

G6W7R2

“aunque estábamos enfocados en pronunciación siento que también mi comprensión de lectura ha mejorado y eso puedo notarlo ya que ahora puedo estructurar mis ideas sin tener la necesidad de recurrir al texto en cada momento”

In this piece of information, the researchers can infer that the components of collaborative study groups resulted as useful for participants to develop a set of language skills, not only because they learned how to implement a set of pronunciation strategies, but also because through the activities their reading comprehension improved their capacity for structuring ideas, retain information, understand the message of the text and its meaning.

This finding is aligned to what Sever (1995) who explored different techniques and approaches that may be used to promoting reading comprehension inside his class of Turkish as a foreign language. The author concluded that since reading is a multidimensional process covering various aspects such as communication, perception, cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic processes carrying out reading comprehension activities through collaborative learning strategies such as group work, active interaction and sharing ideas proved to be fruitful for the process to be experienced more actively. The instructor found that apart from reading comprehension, collaborative work no only benefits reading comprehension; also, it helps other students’
language skills such as grammar, writing, and speaking. Despite, our focus was not reading comprehension, it had a significant role in the activities. As a conclusion, the collaborative components that the author identified as important for the development of reading within collaborative learning scenarios such group work and active interaction were present in the implementation of the project.

Other excerpt, taken from an interview shows how the listening skill was developed in the research. The participant was inquired about his personal and academic development in the whole project.

I2Q3B:

“Me benefició mucho en el listening... me ayudó demasiado porque como cada semana tenía que hacer seguimiento del proceso, entonces tenía que corregir la pronunciación de mis compañeros y como no sabía pronunciar algunas palabras entonces comparaba la pronunciación del diccionario con la de ellos entonces yo aprendí mucho también en la parte de listening.”

In this excerpt, the subject claims to have benefitted from the exposure to peer correction. He points out that the constant process of correcting other members of his group pushed him to sharpen his listening skill since there were moments of uncertainty when it was necessary to check through other means the pronunciation of words such as dictionaries and compare them with the peer’s pronunciation. By carrying out the autonomous process of double checking and comparing a previously recorded peer oral intervention to the phonological sounds indicated in other sources such as dictionaries, the subject became aware of the standard pronunciation of some words and at the same time he considered that his listening skill improved through the process. This outcome was no less than remarkable to the participant that led him to search by himself in other sources pronunciation patterns.

This excerpt, taken from a reflective log evidenced the strengthening of listening skill. The participants had to reflect about what went well in the project.

G2W8R2
“Ahora que el proyecto ha terminado siento que mi capacidad para escuchar es mejor que la que tenía cuando empecé, porque ahora puedo reconocer cuando mis compañero me hablan en presente o pasado solo escuchándolos”

From this data, we found that learners’ constant work in phonological aspects of language and the urgent need for participants to identify those aspects in the oral production of their peers resulted in the enhancement of participants listening skills. Besides, learners that are actively involved in collaborative learning tend to develop skills they could need to fulfill the task required in that collaborative work.

Authors like Fiechtner and Davis (1992) explain that regardless the subject matter, when learners are actively involved in collaborative work, they tend to gradually develop the skills they might need to fulfill the activities presented in such collaborative work units. On the other hand, regarding the linguistic aspect, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, (1991) argue that to address language learning through collaborative study groups involve helping one another in mastering language content giving and receiving constructive feedback, and managing disagreements. The same authors also explain that language learners correctly involved within collaborative work are likely to exhibit active and tolerant listening. In agreement with the authors we consider that collaborative study groups encourage listening skill since it promotes communication process as listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages to give back an accurate pronunciation.

Information also reveals that the implementation of collaborative study groups worked as a mean of enhancing participants’ vocabulary. It seems that participants’ interest to learn the accurate pronunciation of words. Data collection instruments like reflective logs and interviews are used to support this finding.

JE05:
“In today’s session there were several new words for the learners, but a considerable number of students looked up the pronunciation of the words prior to the meeting and even they brought the phonological transcription on their notebooks.”

In this particular session there was an extraordinary amount of new information which was unknown by the learners that led to a massive search of related data by the participants to the extent of having the need to carry out to the meeting location. This reflects the high level of autonomy and commitment shown by most of the learners in this process that enriched their learning experience.

Another piece of information, taken from a reflective log shows how the sub skill of vocabulary was enhanced through the project.

G5W6R2

“El grupo se mostró interesado en aprender el significado de nuevas palabras y la pronunciación de las mismas.”

In this sample, it can be observed how the necessity for participants to adapt new words to their repertoire worked as a trigger for language learners to look for the accurate pronunciation of such words. Besides, to integrate the pronunciation of new vocabulary served as an opportunity for participants to practice second language phonology.

In accordance with this information, Huffman (2010), who investigated how participation in collaborative learning environments impacts ESL students’ attitudes and motivation towards English vocabulary, and their understanding of and ability to use the target vocabulary appropriately in context. Two treatment groups composed for 24 advanced level ESL students completed an online vocabulary learning task either individually or collaboratively; therefore, It
was found that features present in collaborative learning scenarios like group work and interaction with others contributed greatly to language learners to increase and manage their vocabulary. Also the researcher concluded that despite the language focus that a collaborative study group might have, collaborative work affects a varied range of language skills like vocabulary. We agree with the author in the terms of the factors that affect the increase of repertoire. Even though collaborative work played an important role for the development of this sub skill, it also depends on participant’s commitment and motivation towards language process, as it is shown in data sample, the learners showed great motivation towards vocabulary learning.
PEDAGOGICAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This research project has presented a number of findings that may contribute to develop pronunciation and teamwork skills to the field of second language teaching and learning.

Firstly, collaborative study groups should be nurtured by the teacher and the students on the grounds that it has been proved effective in educational fields. One of the necessities that is needed to be covered is the enhancement and promotion of the metacognitive process on pronunciation courses. Besides, CSGs contributed to the process of reflection and self-monitoring of mistakes. However, this kind of project needs to keep working in CSGs inasmuch as the students present a lack of autonomy, non-responsibility, and absence of compromise.

Secondly, the pronunciation practice granted throughout the project, the participants gained a considerable amount of teaching experience due to the various roles assigned to each and every one of them. A handy recommendation to carry out those practices should include a wide variety of activities from other sources of language skills such as reading, listening and writing. Students need to continue this process in a more exhaustive way to improve their own learning experience in order to reach a proficient linguistic competence.

In this section, the study will provide what might be done by the future researches in similar research taking into account different points of views to continue the enhancement of the pronunciation learning strategies.

The future researchers should consider a figure of authority in the selection and in the implementation of the CSGs, which is considered relevant on the grounds that the presence of a leader motivates the learner to be aware about the learning process. On the other hand, the researcher should set up groups in which the participants have different English levels; this will be done with the purpose of ensuring that feedback given comes from a competent student.

Finally, it is relevant to debate that this type of project should be implemented in different subjects from the English language program inasmuch as it provides tools and techniques to raise
their own learning and teaching process. In teaching programs, undergraduate students should be given the opportunity to expose themselves to pedagogical scenarios where they can develop skills in designing tasks, monitoring peers, and correcting one another.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though this study observed results reporting the fact that collaborative study groups can help learners to join cooperative work and implement social skills that allow them to develop pronunciation skills, there are some phases that limited us as researchers when trying to proceed with all the stages we had initially planned for this research.

In the first place, time limitation was an important element that affected the development of the inquiry because the members of the group had different academic schedules, which made the meetings to work on the project very difficult to carry out. Additionally, the lack of autonomy by some participants was reflected during the project; considering that this kind of research involves collaborative work, the autonomy and the commitment of one participant affects the overall results due to the fact that every member has their own responsibilities within the group.

Another limitation of this study was that many of the participants that were part of the study groups did not have the adequate level to provide corrections. Owed to the fact that the project activities involved students to engage in active peer correction, the learners’ inability to offer meaningful or correct feedback represented a major barrier in the making of such activities; also the feedback presented by most of the learners sometimes was not accurate, lessening the reliability of the project.

Some participants had some issues when attending the sessions without proper homework of their role previously accomplished. This became an obstacle that was represented when attempting to carry out the session without all the activities accurately developed and completed as well as the material needed to be used at the moment of the meeting as it was more difficult to successfully finish the group session hardly getting out the best of it.
CONCLUSIONS

After concluding this study, we can determine that CSGs contributed to the development of autonomous attitudes and led the student to be more responsible and take control of their own learning process. Besides, CSGs allowed learners in constantly reflections for the construction of knowledge in terms of phonological control with the help of feedback, and self-monitoring.

Even though the project required participants who have special characteristics such as autonomy, commitment and responsibility, the results indicate the lack of those features in some participants. However, some members demonstrated better commitment with the progress of the activities, which makes those students exhibit modifications in the production of a second language.

Furthermore, It was due to the extensive variety of activities suggested to inspire the practice of pronunciation that it was possible to merge listening and reading tasks into the project qualifying it to become an inclusive learning experience; besides, collaborative work was useful for participants to consolidate knowledge of the target language.
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The implementation of collaborative study groups for promoting pronunciation learning

Newbury House.


Appendix 1
Researcher’s journal format

General description: Green
Extra information:

JOURNAL

- The activities attempt to involve the whole IPA
  - Activities in which there are phonological transcriptions have let them to realize about how certain words are pronounced. Moreover, knowing about phonemes allow them to identify the pronunciation of those unknown words.
  - Some of the learners have improved in the differentiation between sounds like /f/ /θ/ /v/ and /z/.
- Students present challenging activities in which they need to make a great effort to develop them. Moreover, they all help each other because some students have a deeper knowledge than the other.
  - Team work: Participants (John and Carolina) have been learning from their partners (Luka and Dayana).
- The activity session have allowed them to learn many unknown words.
- Through the use of roles, the Ss have discovered a variety of learning strategies, most of which have been started to implement in their learning process.
  - Learning words through the use of synonyms and antonyms.
  - Cooperative learning: before starting to read, they talk about those possible difficult words to say. Besides, some participants share certain knowledge about punctuation, how stress, intonation and fluency can affect the speech.
- As the Ss move through pronunciation course, the activities start to become more challenging. Moreover, they start to involve the content of the class, as a way to evidenced that, the participants perform activities in which they need to identify content words and function words as well some suprasegmental features such as intonation and fluency.
- Some recommendations such as, read carefully and several times before recording. Identify the punctuation symbols, be aware of the regular verb at the moment of reading, take into account those that start with "s", and asking for help if there is any doubt about the pronunciation of certain words, have been useful for them to improve their pronunciation as well as the reading skill.
- The participants have evidenced the improvement of vocabulary, they argued that their range of words have increased a lot.
- The project has allowed to the participant developing reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.
- The activities that Luka designed were challenging for the Ss. Nevertheless, in my consideration those activities were very useful for them because it allowed to go beyond their level.
- Even though they are able to read a text in phonological transcription, they are not able to write with phonemes.
- A problem that is still presenting is the addition of "s" in words that begin with "ks".
- The understanding of the phonetic symbols have been increasing significantly.
- The use of some web pages such as: http://www.cupchina.com.hk/dict/phonetic/home.html and http://www.phonnet.com/Online/Text2Phonetics.aspx have been used as sources of input to pronunciation.
Appendix 2
Interview questions performed to the participants

1. ¿Cómo descriptes la experiencia de haber participado en un grupo de estudio de pronunciación?
2. ¿Qué aspectos resaltas de esta experiencia?
3. ¿Podrían describir el proyecto en términos de fortalezas y recomendaciones para una próxima oportunidad?
4. ¿Cómo se evidenciaron durante el proceso a nivel personal y académico?

Appendix 3
Reflective logs formats

<table>
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<th>24/02/2013</th>
<th>1st Meeting</th>
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<td>Word collector</td>
<td>Denys Montenegro</td>
<td>Luisa Fernández</td>
<td>John Ortiz</td>
<td>Lisa Tola</td>
<td>Dayana</td>
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<td>Sound dealer</td>
<td>Alejandra</td>
<td>Dayana Montenegro</td>
<td>Lisa Tola</td>
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<td>Luisa Fernández</td>
<td>John Ortiz</td>
<td>Lisa Tola</td>
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<td>Ingrid Carolina Montenegro</td>
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<td>John Ortiz</td>
<td>Alejandra</td>
<td>Ingrid Carolina Montenegro</td>
<td>Dayana Montenegro</td>
<td>John</td>
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59
### Appendix 4

Error analysis rubric

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<th>Common mistakes</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
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<th>Week 3</th>
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Additional notes:

- /θ/ instead of /θ/ is unacceptable.
- /θ/ instead of /θ/ is acceptable.
- /æ/ instead of /æ/ is acceptable.
- /æ/ instead of /æ/ is unacceptable.