

Implementation of Task-Based Learning Approach to Improve Pronunciation

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Abstract

This action research project reports how Task Based Learning approach contributed to improve eighth graders' pronunciation in an EFL class in a public institution in Bello, Colombia. In this project, three oral tasks were developed following the three phases of Task-Based Learning proposed by Willis (1996). I collected data through a reflective log and audio recordings of the students' presentations. The findings of this project revealed that students improved their EFL pronunciation, which was manifested in the increase of well-pronounced vowel sounds, the development of the native speakers' imitation strategy, the preparation and the self-confidence to participate, and the awareness about the mother tongue interference.

Key words: Task-Based Learning approach, oral task, vowel sounds pronunciation, preparation, feedback, native speakers' imitation, self-confidence, mother tongue interference.

Degree Requirement

This action research project was conducted during the development of my pedagogical practicum in a public institution, as a requirement of the B.Ed. in Foreign Languages Teaching (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

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Table of Contents

Preface	6
Description of the Context	7
Statement of the Problem	9
Theoretical Background	10
Task-Based Learning Approach	11
Pronunciation	13
Preparation and Feedback	14
Research Question	14
General Objective	14
Specific Objectives	15
Action Plan	15
Data Collection Procedure	15
Development of Actions	16
Data Analysis	19
Findings and Interpretations	20
Students' EFL Pronunciation Improvement	20
Conclusions	29
Reflection	30
References	32
Appendix	34

Preface

This is a report of an action research project on exploring how the implementation of Task Based Learning (TBL) approach contributed to improve eighth graders' EFL pronunciation in a public institution in Bello, Antioquia, Colombia, from January to November 2017. The decision to implement TBL approach emerged after the class observations and reflections I developed during the first semester of the year.

English as a foreign language (EFL) has become not only a possibility, but also a necessity in the Colombian context. Educational policies intend to turn the population into bilingual speakers. Interaction and communication between people depends greatly on the speaking skill. Therefore, I decided to develop this project in order to contribute to the students' EFL pronunciation improvement.

Consequently, this action research project addresses English teachers who seek a better approach to deal with students' EFL mispronunciation. After developing this project, I concluded that TBL approach helped the students to improve their pronunciation in spite of the short time disposed to execute the actions of this project. This improvement allowed them to pronounce better during speaking activities. I hope the improvement showed may impact positively their speaking performance. Thus, I expect that teacher researchers feel encouraged to explore EFL pronunciation as a crucial component to communicate effectively.

Description of the Context

This action research project was developed in a public institution located in Manchester neighborhood in Bello, Antioquia. The institution offers pre-school, elementary school and secondary school in two shifts; one in the morning, holding approximately 350 students; and one in the afternoon, with approximately 350. The school has two buildings, one old and one new. Each building has three floors. The institution has around 14 classrooms, restrooms for girls and for boys, a library, a computer room, a laboratory, a school store, the principal's office, the coordinator's office, the secretary's office and the teachers' room. The classroom where the classes took place has 35 chairs and two teachers' desks. The resources available are a whiteboard, a T.V. set, speakers, a locker, ten English-Spanish dictionaries, and the teacher's laptop assigned by the institution. The school is near the town main park, a train station, health centers, churches, banks, malls and stores.

The syllabus

According to the Institutional Educational Project (IEP), the philosophy of the school is to educate children and youth who respect the difference and pretend comprehensive development. With respect to the mission, the institution follows the sociocultural approach so it intends to offer an inclusive and equitable quality education. Moreover, the main principles that guide the institutional doing are autonomy and commitment.

Regarding the English syllabus, three EFL teachers elaborated it. It is distributed into four terms. The students have 3 hours of English lessons a week. Every hour lasts 55 minutes. The eighth's grade purpose is to strengthen communication through comprehension and production skills.

The students

The eighth-grade class has 32 students, 16 girls and 16 boys, whose ages range from 13 to 16 years old. All of them live in Bello and belong to socioeconomic strata 2 and 3. They are respectful and kind with their teacher and classmates. They like to work cooperatively. The level of the students in this course is A1, based on the CEFR. Therefore, they have a limited use of English, which means that they are able to produce simple ideas using the target language, but they are not able to hold a conversation or dialogue. Most of the learners seem to be motivated in the course because they participate in class and develop the activities proposed. I realized that they are mostly encouraged and engaged in listening activities. “Students participated actively in the activity and they were really motivated when listening to the song” (Reflective Log, entry #4, February the 16th, 2017). According to a survey applied on May the 2nd to 29 out of 32 students, and based on my reflective log, the activities they like the most are warming-up activities, listening activities and oral presentations. On the contrary, they dislike written activities and worksheets exercises. “The learners were quite fascinated performing the warming-up activity. This was a crucial stage to catch learner’s attention during the lesson” (Reflective Log, Class #3, April 4th, 2017).

The teacher

The cooperative teacher (CT) holds a degree in Spanish and English from a private university in Medellín. Besides, she studied in a public Normal school in the East of the region. She has six years of experience in teaching English. She started teaching in the institution where this research project took place just this year. She argues that she takes into account the students’ needs and interests to keep them actively involved in their learning process. She promotes both individual and collaborative learning. She implements listening, reading, writing and speaking

activities in her lessons. She usually enacts her lessons using Spanish, since she thinks that if the students find difficulty to understand explanations provided in their mother tongue, it will be much more confusing for them to understand instructions in a foreign language. For assessing learners, the teacher takes into account class participation and engagement, and activities completion, as well as their improvement in the command of the language. Her assessment system is mainly focused on the summative approach, although she also implements the formative approach. Finally, due to her relationship with students is respectful and they dialogue constantly, the class environment is positive.

Statement of the Problem

I observed and reflected on a series of EFL lessons during which the students developed oral presentations about famous characters. One of the issues I identified was the students' mispronunciation –mainly of vowel sounds– when using L2. EFL pronunciation is a fundamental skill to reach an effective interaction between different speakers. Luchini (2005) argues that pronunciation has become an essential element in language teaching and learning in order to communicate successfully (p. 192).

Accordingly, the role of teachers in EFL classrooms is essential in providing learners with tools to be able to express ideas and thoughts with an understandable EFL pronunciation. Therefore, teachers' methodology should include class activities that provide the students with the opportunity to pronounce in the foreign language. Rojanacheewinsupond, Sayankena and Watkhaolarm (2009, p. 2) claim that the core of foreign language learning is to communicate effectively. This success depends on the way learners pronounce the language. Thus, good pronunciation is achievable through interesting classroom activities (Rojanacheewinsupond et al., p. 2).

When the students were asked about the difficulties they had to use English as a foreign language, 16 out of 29 pointed out that their main obstacle was mispronunciation (Learners' Survey, May 2nd, 2017). Concerning the origin of the students' mispronunciation, I observed two main issues. Firstly, their mother tongue interfered or perturbed EFL pronunciation. On the one hand, they were not familiarized with the sounds from the target language, so they pronounced many words using their native language sounds. "Students' pronunciation and fluency were not good. They spoke as if they were reading in Spanish" (Reflective Log, entry #8, March 14th, 2017). As a result, the ideas they shared orally were not understandable. On the other hand, they had to resort to their L1 in order to communicate when they did not know how to pronounce in the L2. As I wrote in my reflective log, "the learners had many difficulties to pronounce words and sentences in English. That is why they had to use their native language to make themselves understood" (Reflective Log, entry #6, February 28th, 2017).

Secondly, the students did not receive any feedback about their pronunciation performance. Regarding this matter, I wrote in my reflective log that the students should be provided with tools that allow them to improve their pronunciation (Reflective Log, entry #11, March the 30th, 2017).

Considering my reflections, I decided to focus this action research project on implementing Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach to improve learners' EFL pronunciation. Task-Based Learning offers the students the opportunity to practice and improve oral skills while developing the tasks in the classroom context, which represents and deals with real-life issues through using the language (Rojanacheewinsupond et al., 2009, p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I introduce the key concepts that guided this action research project. I will

deal with definitions, theory and principles that support these concepts. Firstly, I will describe the main characteristics of Task-Based Learning approach. Secondly, I will present the meaning of oral task for this research project. Thirdly, I will define pronunciation and its influence in language learning. Finally, I will explain learners' preparation and teacher's feedback on pronunciation.

Task-Based Learning approach

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an approach in foreign language learning and teaching that aims at designing and implementing a sequence of communicative tasks for a meaningful use of the target language (Willis & Willis, 2001, p. 173). Therefore, I decided to implement TBL approach because it focuses on carrying out classroom activities that contribute to develop oral skills, including pronunciation. As Hashemi, Azizinezhad and Darvishic (2011, p. 526) argue, Task-Based Learning is an approach that provides language learners with enough material. As a result, students commit themselves to carry out a task (Hashemi et al., p. 526). Accordingly, TBL approach gives the opportunity to promote students' participation in the language learning process, enabling them to improve the speaking skill.

Four of the Task-Based Learning principles that Nunan (2004, pp. 35-37) summarized are as follows. Firstly, scaffolding principle claims that the students' language learning is guaranteed through the activities, materials and topics that the teacher selects (Nunan, 2004, p. 35). Secondly, active learning principle focuses on learning by doing, while using the target language actively (Nunan, 2004, p. 36). Thirdly, reproduction to creation principle states the learners first imitate the input provided, and after internalizing the L2, they are able to produce their own language through creativity (Nunan, 2004, p. 37). Finally, reflection principle suggests that the language teacher must provide the learners with spaces to reflect on their learning process in

order to improve (Nunan, 2004, p. 37).

According to Willis (1996, p. 40) the procedure to implement Task-Based Learning approach in L2 lessons is integrated by three stages. First, the teacher designs a pre-task activity that introduces the topic, activates students' previous knowledge, and aims at preparing content. Second, the main-task cycle takes place: learners work in pairs or small groups discussing their ideas, planning their oral report, and finally, presenting their outcome. Third, the post-task stage is developed by the teacher through giving feedback to students and focusing on linguistic patterns identified during the task performance (Willis, 1996, p. 40). Regarding TBL approach in this action research project, the strategy of learners' preparation on pronunciation takes place in the pre-task phase, while the strategy of teacher's feedback on pronunciation is implemented during the post-task stage.

Tasks are the cornerstone of Task-Based Learning approach. Nunan (1989) defines a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). Likewise, Willis (1996) defines an oral task as an activity in which the learner is able to use the foreign language in order to reach a communicative outcome (p. 24). This action research project is based on Task-Based Learning approach because oral tasks respond to students' interests and needs. Oral tasks are suitable to deal with learners' mispronunciation. Nevertheless, some of the activities developed during the implementation of the project could follow a different methodology or approach because of my cooperative teacher's requests and the needs of the moment.

Peña and Onatra (2009, p. 12) state that the development of oral tasks implies to consider speaking as a productive skill and listening as a receptive skill. Accordingly, speaking and

listening are oral skills that must be developed simultaneously. Therefore, language teachers have to implement not only speaking activities, but also listening activities (Peña & Onatra, 2009, p. 12). Regarding this action research project, listening activities are essential because they give exposure to pronunciation patterns of the target language and provide the tools to comprehend it. Hence, the students need to receive oral input before developing EFL speaking activities.

Pronunciation

The process of learning a foreign language implies the development of four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pronunciation is a fundamental component in the speaking skill. It refers to the way in which language is pronounced. According to the Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar “pronunciation means how we say words”. Consequently, Almaqrn and Alshabeb (2017, p. 210) argue that the process of pronouncing correctly in any specific language integrates two main features. On the one hand, segmental features refer to the particular consonant and vowel sounds (p. 210). On the other hand, suprasegmental features are related to words’ stress, tone, rhythm and intonation (Almaqrn and Alshabeb, 2017, p. 210). This action research project focuses on segmental features even though only vowel sounds are dealt.

A clear pronunciation has relevance in speaking and making oneself understood by other speakers because it allows to establish an effective interaction (Almaqrn & Alshabeb, 2017, p. 210). Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that a correct pronunciation in this research project does not refer to a perfect or native-like pronunciation. Instead, correct pronunciation is focused on helping the students to approach a better pronunciation of English vowel sounds when speaking. Additionally, vowel sounds are not taught explicitly to students. By contrast, they are dealt implicitly as the oral tasks are developed.

Preparation and Feedback

On the one hand, preparation refers to the means and sources that the language teacher uses with the purpose of guiding the students to gather language patterns (April & Pearson, 2005, p. 483). Thus, preparation in this action research project is understood as learners' training and readiness on pronunciation features before developing a speaking activity. Accordingly, listening as a receptive skill contributes positively to learners' preparation. According to Baker and Burry (2016) the students' English pronunciation could not present a positive progress if the EFL teacher did not encourage them to be prepared before speaking (p. 2).

On the other hand, Hattie and Timperley (2007) state that feedback is the information provided by the teacher concerning learners' performance (p. 81). Consequently, for this project, feedback denotes pronunciation suggestions and remarks that the teacher provides to students after finishing an oral task. Feedback is relevant in foreign language learning because it helps learners to prevent future mistakes and to avoid failure or frustration in the process (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, pp. 372-373). Thus, feedback in this research project focuses on the most general patterns of the students' mispronunciation in order to provide the pronunciation tools to improve their speaking skill. Moreover, feedback is often provided implicitly through listening activities.

Research Question

How does Task-Based Learning approach contribute to improve eighth graders' pronunciation in an EFL class in a public institution in Bello?

General Objective

To explore how the implementation of Task-Based Learning approach contributes to improve eighth graders' pronunciation in an EFL class in a public institution in Bello.

Specific Objectives

- To implement oral tasks in the EFL classroom context.
- To enhance students' pronunciation of English vowel sounds.
- To promote learners' preparation, teacher's feedback and listening activities that help the students to pronounce better.

Action Plan

In order to achieve the goal of implementing Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach to improve students' English pronunciation, I carried out three oral tasks. Every task was designed following the three stages or cycles of TBL proposed by Willis (1996, p. 40) namely pre-task, main task, and post-task. In the pre-task stage, the students were exposed to listening activities and prepared their presentations or reports via looking for information, familiarizing with vocabulary, and preparing pronunciation. The listening activities were selected according to the topic and the grammar content established on the course syllabus, and the vocabulary was directed by me. During the main task cycle, the learners organized the content of their intervention and produced their oral outcomes. Finally, in the post-task stage, I provided the students with feedback on pronunciation and we developed other listening activities. I conducted a rigorous data collection process in order to meet the project goals.

Data Collection Procedure

I implemented two data collection methods:

Reflective log. I wrote an entry after each class in which I described and reflected on the events occurred. I reported the progress of the learners' English pronunciation during the implementation of oral tasks in the EFL classroom. The purpose of collecting these data was to analyze how my intervention provided the students with tools to improve their pronunciation

when speaking in English. Additionally, the reflective log allowed me to keep track of the pre-task, main task and post-task phases.

Audio recordings. The students' oral presentations and reports were audio recorded during the execution of the action plan. I wrote the transcriptions of some fragments of the recordings. This method was used as a direct evidence for analyzing the students' pronunciation improvement as well as the usefulness of the development of the oral tasks. Consequently, the audio recordings allowed me to determine in what aspects the actions developed helped the learners to improve the pronunciation of EFL vowel sounds.

Likewise, I designed three oral tasks in order to achieve the objectives of this action research project. Firstly, the learners developed an oral presentation about a common issue in groups of three people. They presented general information about the issue and the impact of each issue in daily-life events. Secondly, the students presented a report about an environmental project they developed in teams of four and five people. They presented the problem, the possible solution, a poster they designed, and evidences about the implementation of their project. Finally, the learners individually, in pairs and in trios sang a song following the Karaoke version.

Development of Actions

In this section I present the actions developed with the purpose of reaching the objectives of this action research project.

Before starting the implementation of the action plan, I presented the project to students. During the first week, I explained to them the problem identified, the objectives of the project, the three oral tasks planned and their procedures, and finally, the two data collection methods I decided to use. Moreover, I came to an agreement with students about the contents and topics we

would work on during the third academic term.

Next, I implemented the starting point activity aiming at analyzing their current level in EFL pronunciation. In pairs, the students had to read aloud a dialogue about healthy lifestyle. The learners had three minutes to work autonomously before reading in order to familiarize with the text. This starting point allowed me to confirm that the main matter in students' mispronunciation was vowel sounds. Consequently, I noticed that the individual sound /i/ and the diphthongs /ei/ and /ai/ disclosed the greater difficulty in learners' pronunciation.

Subsequently, I developed the first oral task. The students organized in groups of three people. I wrote a list of common issues on the whiteboard and each group chose one. The issues were sexuality, education, mass media, economy, politics, health, transportation, peace, security, and democracy. During the pre-task stage, each group had to prepare an oral presentation about the issue chosen, so they started searching information on the web. Then, they divided the duties and responsibilities, including the visual aid. I asked them to prepare the pronunciation for the presentation. I instructed them on the pronunciation of some specific words which were difficult for them. After that, we developed a listening activity. The students listened to the song *Come Together* by The Beatles, and completed the lyrics of the song by filling in the gaps. Afterward, I explained very briefly ten English vowel sounds and I asked the learners to pronounce some words containing one or several of those sounds. During the main task phase, the students developed the oral presentations of the different topics. They presented general information about the topic and explained its influence in the Colombian context. Each presentation lasted five to ten minutes. Just one group out of ten did not prepare the task, so they did not present the topic. After finishing the oral presentations, the post-task stage took place. I provided feedback on pronunciation to each group about specific words in which they should improve the

production of vowel sounds. The feedback provided was both oral and written.

Next, I implemented the second oral task. The students had to develop an environmental project in teams of four or five people. They were free to choose the environmental issue. During the pre-task phase, I introduced the topic through a listening activity. The students watched a video about a recycling project and they wrote a summary in English. After that, each team wrote their environmental problem and the possible solution they proposed. Then, they designed a poster in which they wrote a title, drew a logo and wrote a motto. Later, each group collected and showed evidence about the operation of their project. Subsequently, the learners developed a listening comprehension activity. They watched and listened to a short documentary about the care of the planet. They had to complete the script and to answer ten questions according to the video. For the main task stage, each team prepared and developed a short report in English for sharing their projects with the group. One student presented the problem, other presented the solution, another explained the poster, and the last one explained how they collected evidence. To carry out the post-task phase, I decided to provide feedback through a song. The learners listened to Earth Song of Michael Jackson. They had to complete the lyrics. The missing words were related to the environment and the planet Earth. Then, we sang the song twice. Additionally, we watched a video about zoo animals, and the students wrote the vocabulary on their notebooks.

Lastly, we developed the third oral task. The students worked individually, in pairs, or in trios. They had to choose a song to be sung following the Karaoke version. In the pre-task stage, we watched a video in which a girl sang Eye of the Tiger by Survivor in a contest. Then, I sang Crawling of Linkin Park in order to show the students an example of what they were expected to do, and to make them feel confident to present their own Karaoke song. They prepared the

pronunciation of their songs at home. During the main task phase, the learners sang their songs following the Karaoke version, which was played in the T.V. set. Just three people did not participate. During the post-task stage, I provided feedback through a listening activity. The students listened to the song *My Heart Will Go On* by Céline Dion. They had to complete the lyrics.

It is relevant to point out that the oral tasks were modified to some extent from the original design because of time limitations and my cooperative teacher's demands. However, the development of the tasks contributed sequentially to the students' pronunciation improvement.

Data Analysis

Aiming at analyzing the data collected, I followed the five-step process proposed by Taylor-Power and Renell (2003, pp. 2-5). Step 1, get to know the data. Step 2, focus the analysis. Step 3, categorize information. Step 4, identify patterns and connections within and between categories. Step 5, interpretation – Bringing it all together. Accordingly, firstly, I explored deeply the data by listening several times to the audio recordings and reading twice my reflective log. Moreover, I selected the information which would be useful to answer my research question. Secondly, I focused the data analysis by event. That is, I organized and analyzed the data by oral task developed, rather than by individual or group sample, and I identified connections – similarities and differences – between each. Thirdly, I categorized data by identifying emergent categories. Fourthly, I identified patterns inside categories and determined importance and relationships between them. Finally, I used the connections within and between categories to interpret and make sense of the selected data.

Findings and Interpretations

In this section I report the findings and interpretations coming from the analysis process of the development of actions of my research project, which intends to explore how the implementation of TBL approach contributes to improve students' pronunciation. During the data analysis, I noticed that the students' pronunciation improvement was revealed and perceptible in the increase of well-pronounced vowel sounds, the development of the native speakers' imitation strategy, the preparation and the self-confidence to participate in the oral tasks, and the awareness about the mother tongue interference.

Students' EFL Pronunciation Improvement

Students' increase of well-pronounced vowel sounds. Data from the starting point activity showed that the students pronounced correctly approximately the half of the words containing the vowel sounds /i/, /eɪ/, and /aɪ/ (*see appendix*). The sound that manifested a greater mispronunciation was /i/, while the sound /aɪ/ had a more acceptable score. For instance, in the excerpt "you must make sure that you eat the right foods (...) a glass of wine a day would be ok" (Audio recordings, starting point activity, July 25th, 2017), **St21** mispronounced words like *make*, *eat* and *wine*, while he pronounced properly *right*, *day* and *be*.

The development of the first oral task revealed that the students presented a bigger difficulty to pronounce properly the three vowel sounds. The diphthongs /eɪ/ and /aɪ/ presented a short increase (*see appendix*). Nonetheless, the individual vowel sound /i/ reflected a considerable decrease. This situation probably appeared because this was the first approach of students to Task-Based Learning approach. Furthermore, most of them seemed to be unmotivated during the development of this task and they used technical vocabulary. **St25** mispronounced *defined*, *science*, *society* and *organized*, and pronounced accurately only *be* and

means in the excerpt “the economy can be defined as the science that studies how a society is organized to produce its means of existence” (Audio recordings, first oral task, August 15th, 2017).

Data from the second oral task made evident the improvement. The pronunciation of the vowel sounds /i/ and /aɪ/ disclosed a noticeable increase regarding the previous task (*see appendix*). Nevertheless, the percentage of the diphthong /eɪ/ remained similar. For example, in the excerpt “water is the resource we need the most. Water is the center of life. Take care of it” (Audio recordings, second oral task, September 5th, 2017), St6 mispronounced *resource* and *need*, and pronounced correctly *we*, *life* and *take*.

The development of the third oral task provided truly valuable and meaningful data. Each vowel sound was well-pronounced in most of the words containing these sounds (*see appendix*). In short, at the end of the development of the actions, the pronunciation of the individual sound /i/ and the diphthongs /eɪ/ and /aɪ/ presented improvement. I wrote in my reflective log that “the number of well-pronounced vowel sounds was quite high” (Reflective log entry #21, October 3rd, 2017).

Students’ development of the strategy of native speakers’ pronunciation imitation. The third event reflected a magnificent improvement. This success was possible because the learners developed the imitation strategy. In this oral task, all of the students imitated the original pronunciation of native English speakers. “The learners gave their best to imitate the singers’ voice in order to pronounce the words correctly” (Reflective log entry #21, October 3rd, 2017). The students showed an appropriate reproduction of proficient speakers’ pronunciation. Nonetheless, imitation was not imposed as a paradigm of native-like pronunciation, but the students decided autonomously to use this strategy. When analyzing the audio recordings, I

realized that most of the students sang suitably by imitating the singer's pronunciation. The next table shows the analysis of some fragments of the students' imitation of the vowel sounds /eɪ/, /aɪ/, and /i/:

FRAGMENT	ANALYSIS
<p>St10: [I don't like your little games. Don't like your tilted stage. The role you made me play. Of the fool, no, I don't like you]</p>	<p>St10 imitated correctly the pronunciation of the vowel sounds /aɪ/ in <i>I</i> and <i>like</i>, /eɪ/ in <i>games</i>, <i>stage</i>, <i>made</i> and <i>play</i>, and /i/ in <i>me</i>.</p>
<p>St14 and St20: [Never been awake. Never seen a day break. Leaning on my pillow in the morning]</p>	<p>St14 and St20 reproduced the pronunciation of the individual vowel sound /i/ in <i>been</i>, <i>seen</i> and <i>leaning</i>, and the diphthongs /eɪ/ in <i>awake</i>, <i>day</i> and <i>break</i>, and /aɪ/ in <i>my</i>.</p>
<p>St19: [Look in my eyes, what do you see? The cult of personality. I know your anger, I know your dreams]</p>	<p>St19 pronounced properly the vowel sounds /aɪ/ in <i>my</i> and <i>eyes</i>, and /i/ in <i>see</i> and <i>dreams</i>.</p>
<p>St21: [Maybe I didn't treat you. Quite as good as I should have... You were always on my mind]</p>	<p>St21 imitated appropriately the singer's pronunciation of the diphthongs /eɪ/ in <i>maybe</i> and <i>always</i> and /aɪ/ in <i>I</i>, <i>quite</i> and <i>mind</i>, and the individual sound /i/ in <i>maybe</i> and <i>treat</i>.</p>
<p>St7 and St33: [It might seem crazy what I'm about to say. Sunshine she's here, you can take a break. I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space]</p>	<p>St7 and St33 pronounced accurately the three vowel sounds: /aɪ/ in <i>might</i>, <i>I'm</i> and <i>sunshine</i>, /i/ in <i>seem</i> and <i>she's</i>, and /eɪ/ in <i>crazy</i>, <i>say</i>, <i>take</i>, <i>break</i> and <i>space</i>.</p>

Table 1. Excerpt from the Audio Recordings Analysis. Third Oral Task. September 28th, 2017
and October 3rd, 2017

Listening activities played a crucial role in the approach implemented in this action research project because they guided the students to develop properly the pronunciation imitation strategy. In table 1, it is noticeable that the learners listened to a model and approximated the pronunciation by imitating the native speaker. According to Quian (2012, p. 2205) imitation is an effective technique to improve pronunciation and intonation. This process enables a human being to produce well-pronounced words in the native language. Similarly, pronunciation in a foreign language becomes susceptible to improvement and progress through the imitation strategy (Quian, 2012, p. 2205).

Students' preparation and self-confidence to participate and pronounce. As the students adapted to Task-Based Learning approach, they began to feel prepared to participate and pronounce the words appropriately. After implementing the second oral task, I wrote in my reflective log that “most of the teams had a positive performance and attitude developing their presentations. They prepared the pronunciation of their intervention” (Reflective log entry #15, September 5th, 2017). The success of the students' preparation was also evident in the self-confidence they felt to carry out their presentations producing well-pronounced sounds. I wrote that “the learners reflected a good preparation and self-confidence to develop their presentations, their pronunciation was adequate, and they did not feel pressured when they participated” (Reflective log entry #20, September 28th, 2017).

The preparation and self-confidence of the students came to the point that I did not have to select a student to participate. Instead, I asked for a volunteer and many of them raised their hands, stood up, or said –me–. As I wrote in my reflective log after finishing the third oral task,

“the students were so motivated and engaged in the oral task that I did not need to choose the person who should continue. Rather, they participated voluntarily” (Reflective log entry #21, October 3rd, 2017).

During the implementation of the starting point activity, the students had not any preparation or feedback. As a result, they mispronounced the vowel sounds /eɪ/, /aɪ/, and /i/ in many words. Nevertheless, they corrected the pronunciation of these sounds in the same words after having preparation and feedback during the implementation of the oral tasks. Likewise, the students corrected the pronunciation of many words mispronounced in the first oral task. Table 2 describes some extracts from the data analysis process:

During the starting point activity

St8 and **St5** mispronounced the word *me* with the vowel sound /e/ and the diphthong /aɪ/, respectively. Nonetheless, the word was well-pronounced with the individual vowel sound /i/ during the third oral task by the same students.

St1 mispronounced the word *be* with the vowel sound /e/, but the learner improved the pronunciation of this word using the individual vowel sound /i/ in the third oral task.

St26 and **St3** mispronounced the word *day* with the diphthong /aɪ/. Notwithstanding, they pronounced properly this word using the diphthong /eɪ/ in the first and the third oral tasks, respectively.

St14 mispronounced the word *stay* with the diphthong /aɪ/. However, this learner pronounced correctly the same word using the diphthong /eɪ/ during the development of the second oral task.

St15 mispronounced the word *make* using the individual vowel sound /a/, but this word was well-pronounced with the diphthong /eɪ/ in the third oral task by the same student.

<p>St26 mispronounced the words <i>exercise</i> and <i>right</i> with the individual vowel sound /i/. Nonetheless, the student pronounced accurately these words using the diphthong /aɪ/ during the first and the second oral tasks, respectively.</p>
<p>During the first oral task</p>
<p>St18 and St5 mispronounced the word <i>be</i> with the vowel sound /e/. Nevertheless, they pronounced properly this word using the individual vowel sound /i/ in the second and the third oral tasks, respectively.</p>
<p>St28 mispronounced the word <i>feel</i> with the vowel sound /e/, but the learner approximated the pronunciation of this word using the individual vowel sound /i/ in the third oral task.</p>
<p>St12 mispronounced the word <i>by</i> with the individual vowel sound /i/. However, this student pronounced accurately that word using the diphthong /aɪ/ during the second oral task.</p>
<p>St30 mispronounced the word <i>we</i> with the vowel sound /e/, but he corrected the pronunciation of this word using the individual vowel sound /i/ in the third oral task.</p>

Table 2. Excerpt from the Audio Recordings Analysis of the Actions Developed.

Tunçel (2015, p. 2576) proclaims a relationship between self-confidence and foreign language learning. Students with low self-confidence reflect a negative attitude towards the language learning and the activities proposed by the teacher. By contrast, confident learners participate and speak in the classroom, even if they make mistakes (Tunçel, 2015, p. 2576).

The data made evident the students' self-confidence to participate and pronounce as a result of the development of the pre-task preparation and the post-task feedback defined in TBL approach. During the implementation of these stages, the learners developed listening activities that provided them with insight and guidance in pronunciation. Therefore, in this research

project, listening as a receptive skill became an essential strategy in contributing to the students' self-confidence and pronunciation improvement.

Students' awareness about the mother tongue pronunciation interference. Data revealed that the students raised awareness about the influence of their native language in English' pronunciation. During the implementation of the oral tasks, the learners displayed some strategies that allowed them to fight the influence of their mother tongue in the foreign language pronunciation. Some students self-corrected their pronunciation through taking time to think and pronounce again or repeating the words until approaching to the accurate sounds. Others requested the teacher or a classmate to tell them the proper pronunciation of a word or to approve the way in which they pronounced. I wrote in my reflective log that “when they [the students] did not remember how to say a word, they asked for classmates' or teacher's help. They even self-corrected the pronunciation of some words after two or three seconds trying to remember” (Reflective log entry #15, September 5th, 2017). This awareness was reached thanks to learners' preparation and teacher's feedback, and the frequent occurrence of the vowel sounds in known vocabulary. The next table shows the analysis of the student's self-correction and approval request in EFL pronunciation in order to confront their mother tongue interference:

FRAGMENT	ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGY
<p>St14: we must not cut trees for many reasons... reasons... reasons.</p>	<p>This student self-corrected the pronunciation of the word <i>reasons</i> by repeating three times. First, St14 mispronounced with the diphthong /ea/. After, he mispronounced with the vowel sound /e/. Finally, he pronounced accurately with the individual vowel sound /i/.</p>

<p>St25: the exploita... mmm... exploitation of the...</p>	<p>This student self-corrected through taking time and saying <i>mmm</i> in order to remember the proper pronunciation in the syllable <i>-ta-</i>. Initially, St25 mispronounced with the individual vowel sound /a/, but she then corrected using the diphthong /ei/.</p>
<p>St18: in suburban... profe, ¿cómo es que se dice esto?... areas, trees can be...</p>	<p>This student did not remember the pronunciation of the word <i>areas</i>, but he knew that it was not pronounced as in Spanish. Thus, the learner asked the teacher how to pronounce the word and he repeated correctly using the vowel sounds /ei/ and /i/.</p>
<p>St22: ... to improve the... climate cierto? (asking a classmate)... climate.</p>	<p>This student was not sure about the pronunciation of the word <i>climate</i> in the syllable <i>cli-</i>. Consequently, she requested St24 to confirm the pronunciation, and St24 approved. Nonetheless, St22 mispronounced the word because she did not use the diphthong /ai/, but the individual vowel sound /i/.</p>
<p>St20: One of the main... ¿sí es así? (asking the teacher)... problems is the deforestation of...</p>	<p>This student requested the teacher to confirm the pronunciation of the diphthong /ei/ in the word <i>main</i>. The teacher approved the pronunciation moving the head, so St20 continued speaking without repeating the word.</p>

Table 3. Excerpt from the Audio Recordings Analysis. Second Oral Task. September 5th, 2017

Luo (2014, p. 1702) states that mother tongue interference is an issue in foreign language learning resulting from what learners already know about language. Concerning pronunciation, learners organize the foreign language sounds based on their experiences using the native

language sounds (Luo, 2014, p. 1702). Likewise, Mamo (2016, p. 95) points out that mother tongue influence refers to the phenomenon of transfer of L1 knowledge into the foreign language learning. This reality impacts the language learners' productive skills –including the speaking sub-skill of pronunciation– (Mamo, 2016, p. 95).

The awareness about the mother tongue interference in English pronunciation allowed the students to manifest a positive improvement in pronouncing the vowel sounds /i/, /eɪ/, and /aɪ/. The data made evident that common and quotidian vocabulary was well-pronounced every time, or almost all the times, they appeared during the development of the three oral tasks. Those words are *see, tree, feel, keep, dream, we, need, people, mean, name, say, break, state, crazy, play, way, place, take, made, I, my, like, time, light, life, mind, by, and line*. Additionally, the data revealed that less than 50% of the students mispronounced ordinary words as *be, day* and *high* with the vowel sounds /e/, /aɪ/ and /i/, respectively, during the development of the starting point activity. Nonetheless, these words were well-pronounced with the vowel sounds /i/, /eɪ/, and /aɪ/, respectively, most of the times the learners used them during the oral tasks.

After analyzing the data, I realized that Task-Based Learning approach contributed to improve students' EFL pronunciation. This improvement was reached thanks to the implementation of the pre-task, main task and post-task stages during the development of the oral tasks. The learners' pronunciation improvement was manifested chronologically in four aspects: increase of well-pronounced vowel sounds, development of native speakers' imitation strategy, preparation and self-confidence to participate, and awareness about the mother tongue interference. Some of these findings were expected in advance, while others arose during the data analysis.

Conclusions

The purpose of this action research project was to explore how the implementation of Task-Based Learning approach contributes to students' EFL pronunciation improvement. After the data analysis, it was possible to determine that the approach implemented and the actions developed helped the students to improve their pronunciation in four aspects. First, they increased the number of well pronounced vowel sounds. Second, they developed the strategy of native speakers' pronunciation imitation. Third, they got prepared and self-confident to participate and pronounce. Finally, they became aware of the mother tongue pronunciation interference.

The three stages of TBL –pre-task, main task and post-task– allowed the learners to develop three oral tasks successfully. Learners' preparation, teacher's feedback and listening activities were effective strategies. They provided the students with tools to pronounce better the EFL vowel sounds when developing speaking activities.

The implementation of Task-Based Learning approach was suitable and worthy in the context and the problem described in this action research project. Consequently, I completely could suggest to language teachers in similar contexts to use this approach in the EFL classroom. Nonetheless, the impact of TBL approach can vary, either positively or negatively, depending on the conditions of the context and the kind of problem that must be solved.

Some of the oral tasks developed during this action research project did not have a transcendent incidence in the learners' real lives. Therefore, I suggest for further action research focused on Task-Based Learning to consider the students' realities and quotidian language use. English learners must feel the usefulness of the foreign language to deal with daily communicative situations, even if the research problem is mispronunciation.

EFL teachers have to play a crucial role in the students' learning process by taking into account not only language issues, but also learning for real life. Accordingly, teachers must encourage and foster students' self-confidence through creating a comfortable classroom environment, implementing activities according to the learners' preferences, and providing them with feedback (Tunçel, 2015, p. 2576).

Reflection

Conducting this action research project and developing my pedagogical practicum as a pre-service teacher were quite enriching experiences for my personal and professional growth. As this was a so challenging process in my life, I had to devote much time and dedication to the execution of the project. I found a lot of difficulties in being a novice teacher, implementing the action research proposal, and writing every section of the final report. Nonetheless, my practicum and research advisor's support, guidelines and feedback were determinant in orienting and improving the process.

I learnt many new things and reinforced other ones through this experience. For instance, I learnt that action research is essential and necessary in order to improve teaching. This kind of research seeks to develop a good comprehension of a situation in order to get a change and improve the conditions of the situation. I also realized that research requires discipline, effort, constancy and persistence. Furthermore, this experience enhanced my abilities to write, analyze, observe, describe, reflect and think in a more academic style. Accordingly, I expect to continue exploring the action research methodology in my professional development and my teaching doing, in order to contribute to the country educational transformation from my practice.

I also learnt that Task-Based Learning approach is an excellent opportunity for the foreign language learning process because it allows students to use the language for improving oral skills.

As regards the limitations presented during the development of this research project, the time disposed to implement the action plan was limited. Moreover, extracurricular events and school celebrations forced me to postpone and shorten the activities programmed. Consequently, the pre-task and the post-task phases lacked attention. This situation prevented a greater impact on students' pronunciation. In addition, I could not intervene deeply in learners with difficulties to learn and pronounce. This lack of support was also related to time constraints. At last, my cooperative teacher's demands made me to modify the task stages to some extent.

In short, the development of this action research project and my teaching practicum allowed me to gain valuable experiences that have contributed to my personal and academic knowledge. This process gave me the opportunity to learn that action research is one of the best methodologies to improve education. Consequently, this personal and professional growth will be really helpful for my teaching practice.

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Appendix

Increase of well- pronounced vowel sounds

