

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AT DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL LEVELS: INSIGHTS INTO TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ACTIONS

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Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to reflect upon the place of pronunciation in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching at different educational levels in Poland. To collect the data, an on-line survey was conducted among EFL professionals teaching at primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary schools in Poland. The questions focused on the respondents' beliefs about pronunciation, teachers' competences regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching, and the pronunciation teaching techniques they use. The results depict the most and least frequently used pronunciation teaching techniques at each of the three educational stages, and the beliefs of EFL teachers in Poland regarding pronunciation teaching.

Keywords: pronunciation teaching, educational levels, teacher cognitions

1. Introduction

Rarely has pronunciation been central to teaching English as a foreign language in Poland (e.g. Baran-Łucarz 2006) and worldwide (e.g. Cheng 1998). However, this target language subsystem is fundamental to intelligible communication (Jenkins 2000). In other words, pronunciation is neglected in teaching though focal in L2 interaction. This extremely bi-polar attitude to pronunciation has been recorded among EFL teachers. On the one hand, they frequently complain about a number of external factors that justify their marginal focus on pronunciation teaching (cf. Pawlak 2003; Wrembel 2002). For instance, teachers feel obliged to spend a substantial proportion of classroom time on preparing their learners for taking national exams that focus little on pronunciation (cf. Dłutek 2006). Moreover, pronunciation teaching materials are frequently inadequate in terms of degrees of difficulty for various learner proficiency levels (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2006), and are limited in scope (Szymańska-Czaplak 2006). On the other hand, EFL teachers consider pronunciation to be relatively important, among others, because of its value in intelligible communication (cf. Wrembel 2002; Henderson et al. 2012).

English pronunciation from the perspective of the teacher has been the focus of attention in many quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in Poland (e.g. Czajka 2014; Szpyra-Kozłowska, Frankiewicz & Gonet 2002; Wrembel 2002) and other countries (e.g. Baker 2011; Henderson et al. 2012; Sifakis & Sougari 2005; Thomson 2013). However, although the researchers have investigated the beliefs of EFL teachers who teach pronunciation, they have frequently disregarded clarifications concerning the educational stages, such as primary, lower, and higher secondary levels at which the teachers taught. Nevertheless, this factor needs to be taken into account because these stages differ in educational objectives and requirements, usually specified in national curricula. In other words, while learning pronunciation at various stages, EFL students are of different ages, cognitive abilities, and they may also have disparate goals. Thus, pronunciation teaching techniques that EFL teachers implement must vary. The aim of this research project was to explore EFL teachers' beliefs concerning pronunciation teaching at three educational levels in Poland: primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary. In particular, attention is directed toward teachers' attitudes to pronunciation and pronunciation teaching, their self-evaluation of competences regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching, and the application of classroom pronunciation teaching techniques.

2. The specificity of the educational context

In Poland, EFL teachers employed in the national sector are provided with a core curriculum (The Regulation of the Minister of National Education, 30 May 2014, changing the regulation of the national core-curriculum for kindergartens and state schools, Journal of Laws from 2014, item 803), which lists the guidelines delineating the abilities that a foreign language learner should possess after finishing each educational stage. These statements function as points of reference for teachers who need to implement actions that lead to their students achieving these goals. A brief overview of the core curriculum indications from the perspective of an EFL learner's pronunciation abilities may serve as the background for further discussions on teachers' attitudes to pronunciation and pronunciation teaching techniques implemented by primary, lower, and higher secondary teachers. Table 1 outlines the statements referring directly and indirectly to learners' phonetic abilities. After finishing their primary school, EFL learners should be able to distinguish words that sound similar; recite poems and rhymes; sing songs; take part in short drama performances; use dictionaries and multimedia; use very basic phonetic resources, which are neither specified nor clearly defined in the curriculum. Moreover, they should be able to self-evaluate their linguistic and phonetic abilities, with the help of the European portfolio.

Table 1. Selected core-curriculum guidelines at three educational levels: statements referring directly and indirectly to pronunciation abilities.

Educational level	A learner	
Primary school	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. distinguishes words that sound similar; 2. recites poems, rhymes, sings songs; 3. takes part in short drama performances; 4. is able to use dictionaries and multimedia; 5. uses very basic phonetic resources; 6. self-evaluates his/her linguistic competence (European portfolio). 	
Lower secondary school	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. uses basic phonetic resources; 2. understands very simple, short utterances articulated slowly and clearly in an L2 standard model; 3. self-evaluates his/her linguistic competence (European portfolio); 4. uses various resources in L2 (dictionaries, multimedia). 	
Higher secondary school	Basic level	Extended level
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. uses phonetic resources; 2. understands simple utterances articulated clearly in an L2 standard model. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. uses rich phonetic resources; 4. understands utterances of a different length and form articulated in different receptive conditions.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self-evaluates his/her linguistic competence (European portfolio); 2. uses autonomous techniques for self-study (e.g. dictionaries, authentic texts). 	

The list regarding the phonetic abilities of a lower secondary school student continuing his or her L2 learning is slightly shorter than the one for a primary school pupil. Students who graduate from this type of school should understand very simple, short utterances articulated slowly and clearly in an L2 standard model. Hence, it may be hypothesised that the learners should be familiarised with, for instance, either a Standard British or a General American model. They should also be able to use basic phonetic resources; however, no information is given as a basis for specifying these resources. Next, the guidelines also include the statements that might be indirectly associated with phonetic abilities. For instance, those that refer to the use of such L2 resources as dictionaries and multimedia. Finally, similar to primary school students, lower secondary school learners should be able to self-evaluate their linguistic competence against the European portfolio.

As stated in the national core curriculum, there are two different student profiles for higher secondary school graduates who continue their EFL learning. The first one entails EFL learners developing their language skills at the standard level. While the other comprises those choosing an advanced level. Upon graduation, a standard level EFL student should be able to use phonetic

resources and understand simple utterances articulated clearly in an L2 standard model; whereas the abilities of an advanced level graduate differ in the degree of using phonetic resources that are expected to be more sophisticated. The advanced student should also be able to understand utterances of a different length and form, articulated in different receptive conditions. Additionally, the students in these groups should be equipped with autonomous techniques for self-study, among others, in English pronunciation.

General as they are, the core curriculum specifications may shape teachers' actions, including their approaches to classroom pronunciation teaching. Therefore, it is justified to inspect EFL teachers' beliefs and declared actions taken in order to teach English pronunciation at three educational stages. First, however, an overview of more recent research into teachers' views and approaches to pronunciation teaching in schools is proposed in order to present the empirical perspectives that have already been taken and the results that such studies have generated.

3. EFL teachers' actions and beliefs about teaching English pronunciation

Many scholars have been interested in teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching at state schools in Poland (Czajka 2014; Szpyra-Kozłowska, Frankiewicz & Gonet 2002; Wrembel 2002) and other countries (Henderson et al. 2012; Sifakis & Sougari 2005). The studies into teachers' beliefs, often referred to as *teacher cognitions* (cf. Czajka 2014), are believed to determine what teachers actually do in their classrooms (Wahid & Sulong 2013). Although the general focus of the studies discussed below has been on eliciting teachers' beliefs about pronunciation learning, the more detailed aims have differed considerably. Despite providing invaluable data, rarely have these studies taken different educational stages into account. Mostly, the researchers either surveyed (e.g. Henderson et al. 2012) or interviewed EFL teachers (e.g. Czajka 2014) in order to tap into what teachers believe and actually do with respect to pronunciation.

In studies by Szpyra-Kozłowska et al. (2002) and Wrembel (2002) attention was given to pronunciation aspects taught in Polish schools. Szpyra-Kozłowska et al. (2002) explored secondary school teachers' views on teaching 35 pronunciation aspects at three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. They concluded that the main aspects taught at the beginner level were interdental fricatives, short-long vowels opposition, and lack of /g/ in -ing; at the intermediate level these were intonation in question tags, primary and secondary stress, and stress in nouns and verbs of the same spelling; whereas at the advanced level they noted the overall low application of elision, assimilation, and intonation. Interestingly, the researchers pointed to those items that were rarely taught: clear vs. dark /l/, syllabic /l/, stress shift. In a similar vein, Wrembel (2002) surveyed primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary

school teachers on teaching pronunciation aspects and their levels of phonetic metacompetence. However, when reporting the results, no attention was given to educational stages that the respondents taught. The conclusions were generalised to the whole group of teachers, who indicated pronunciation teaching as important; however, they reported using a limited number of pronunciation teaching techniques, such as repetitions after a recording or after the teacher, using transcription, minimal pairs, and rhymes. Wrembel also analysed the phonetic aspects that EFL teachers believed to be the most difficult to teach, i.e. vowels, interdental fricatives, intonation and stress; and those that, in the view of the teachers, were most important: word stress, vowels, and intonation.

Czajka (2014) investigated attitudes and behaviours regarding pronunciation teaching among higher secondary school teachers. She combined the quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to obtain more reliable data. First, EFL teachers' attitudes and beliefs about pronunciation teaching were collected with the help of a written questionnaire. Next, the same group of the respondents was interviewed on their classroom behaviour. So in other words, she was trying to see whether beliefs translated into what happens in the classroom. The results confirmed a sad and rather pessimistic picture of the place of pronunciation in the higher secondary school classroom. All the participants admitted that pronunciation was neglected mainly due to limited time, lack of teaching materials, and "the absence of pronunciation teaching guidelines and clearly defined aims" (p. 185) – for instance, in the national core curriculum discussed above. Nevertheless, the teachers reported focusing attention on English word stress, interdental fricatives, –ed and –ing endings, and the pronunciation of individual words. Little, however, is known about the techniques these teachers deployed while addressing pronunciation in their classrooms.

Henderson et al.'s (2012) large scale investigation looked into EFL teachers' beliefs on English pronunciation teaching in such countries as Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Macedonia, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. More precisely, the researchers analysed teachers' responses to the English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey (EPTiES), which focused on, among other things, teachers' views on teacher training and their own pronunciation; teachers' awareness of their students' goals and skills; teachers' awareness of students' motivation to speak English; and of their aspiration to achieve native-like pronunciation. The results demonstrated, among other things, inadequate teacher training in the realm of pronunciation, overall positive self-evaluation of teachers' pronunciation, and, in the view of teachers, low aspirations on the part of the students to sound native-like. Despite a comparatively high total number of respondents (N=481), the survey was completed by only 12 Polish EFL teachers. Therefore, there is a need to explore this group further, particularly from the perspective of different educational stages, which have been investigated by Sifakis and Sougari (2005). They explored Greek state school teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation-specific

issues (five classroom practices) at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. Additionally, they were interested in teachers' attitudes toward the importance of learners' attainment of a native-like accent. Interestingly, the results showed significant differences in the declared application of some practices at primary and lower secondary levels – for instance, in exposure to real conversations. What is more, attaining native-like pronunciation was significantly more important for primary school teachers than for upper secondary teachers. These outcomes justify the preliminary assumption that teachers' beliefs on pronunciation teaching at different educational stages may differ.

4. Method

The current study sought to investigate teachers' beliefs and actions concerning pronunciation teaching at Polish state schools. The aim was to find out whether teachers teaching at three educational levels differ in their beliefs about pronunciation teaching and in the pronunciation teaching techniques they use in their classrooms. The study therefore addressed the following research questions:

- a) RQ1. What are teachers' beliefs about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching at three educational levels?
- b) RQ2. How competent (regarding pronunciation) do teachers teaching at three educational levels feel?
- c) RQ3. What are the most/least frequent teaching techniques used by teachers at three educational levels?

4.1. Participants

A total number of 78 respondents (73 females and 5 males) took part in the survey. However, 14 teachers were excluded from the analysis because they had declared teaching either at two levels simultaneously or in the private sector. In the remaining group of 64 there were 20 primary school teachers (18 females, 2 males), 21 lower secondary school teachers (20 females, 1 male), and 23 female higher secondary school teachers. The mean value of the reported years of EFL teaching was 11.5, with the minimum experience of one year and the maximum reaching 32 years of teaching.

4.2. Instrument and procedure

The instrument used to elicit the data was a questionnaire consisting of four parts. The first one elicited bio data, such as gender, type of school the respondents were employed in, and years of teaching experience. The second part consisted of six items, collecting information on teachers' attitudes to

pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. A 5-point Likert scale (from 1 – *I totally disagree* to 5 – *I totally agree*) was used to generate the responses to the following statements: *I pay attention to my English pronunciation; it is important to me how my students speak English; it is important to teach English pronunciation at school; it is important for my students to learn about different English pronunciation models, e.g. British, American, etc.; it is important for my students to identify different English pronunciation models; and it is important for the students to use one pronunciation model.* A similar scale was applied in the third part of the instrument, focusing on self-evaluation of teachers' competences regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. This section included two items: *I am competent enough to teach English pronunciation,* and *my pronunciation is very good.* The last part comprised the largest number of items listing classroom pronunciation teaching techniques. Here, the teachers were requested to mark how frequently they used the techniques in the classroom on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 – *never* to 5 – *always*. The following 16 pronunciation teaching techniques were listed in the questionnaire: repetition after the teacher; repetition after recordings; using transcription by the teacher; recognising phonemic symbols; checking pronunciation in a dictionary; practising with minimal pairs; rhyming; using tongue twisters; acting out dialogues; reading aloud; providing direct instruction, e.g. how to pronounce a 'th' sound; recognising sounds, e.g. same-different, odd-one-out; using elements of drama; guessing stress placement in words; using imitation; and voice recording.

The instrument was piloted with a pen-and-paper questionnaire distributed among 16 EFL teachers in January 2013. Some minor modifications were introduced after the analysis of the data collected in the pilot, like, for instance, adding examples of pronunciation models to one of the questionnaire items. Then the on-line version of the tool was designed and published in March 2013. The data collection period lasted from March 2013 to July 2014. The link to the on-line instrument was distributed through an e-mail network of EFL teachers in Poland.

The data, automatically collected and filed in an Excel sheet, were calculated by means of the software STATISTICA. The basic descriptive statistics, the means (M) and the standard deviations (SD), for the questionnaire items were computed in order to support the responses to the research questions. Additionally, a t-test for independent samples was applied in order to determine statistically significant differences between the results of primary and lower secondary, primary and higher secondary, as well as lower and higher secondary school teachers.

4.3. Results

The data concerning the participants' beliefs about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching can be found in Table 2. Disregarding the educational

level that the teachers taught, they all agreed that it was important to them how their students spoke English, and they considered teaching English pronunciation at school valuable. The mean scores for these two items reached above 4.5 in each group. The respondents also declared that they did pay attention to their English pronunciation. In this respect, the respondents teaching at higher secondary level ($M=4.91$) differed significantly from those teaching at primary level ($M=4.58$) in the sense the former reported paying more attention to their pronunciation than the latter. This was confirmed by a t-test value reaching 2.1 at $p<.05$, calculated in order to check whether the differences between the outcomes in these two groups were statistically significant. Although no other significant differences were found among the groups (not only between primary and higher secondary, but also primary and lower secondary, as well as lower secondary and higher secondary), the participants teaching at the three different educational levels provided consistently lower values for the items concerning pronunciation models. On average, primary and lower secondary school teachers only partially agreed that it was important for their students to identify different English pronunciation models ($M=2.95$ each). The results regarding this statement provided by higher secondary school teachers were similar ($M=3.36$). In the three groups, more than average values (between 3.5 and 4) were given to the items stating that it was important for the students to learn about different English pronunciation models, and it was important for the students to use one pronunciation model.

Table 2. Teachers' beliefs about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching at primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary educational levels (* statistically significant difference).

Teachers' belief about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching	Primary		Lower secondary		Higher secondary	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I pay attention to my English pronunciation	4.58*	.59	4.71	.45	4.91*	.41
It is important to me how my students speak English	4.58	.49	4.62	.57	4.57	.65
It is important to teach English pronunciation at school	4.79	.41	4.57	.66	4.65	.63
It is important for my students to learn about different English pronunciation models, e.g. British, American, etc.	3.42	1.09	3.48	.96	3.70	.86
It is important for my students to identify different English pronunciation models	2.95	1.1	2.95	.92	3.36	.71
It is important for the students to use one pronunciation model	3.68	1.03	3.52	1.05	3.65	.86

The second research question concerned the self-evaluation of teachers' competences regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. As can be seen from Table 3, the teachers mostly reported that they were competent

enough to teach English pronunciation (with the means reaching 4.21, 4.15 and 4.17 for primary, lower, and higher secondary levels, respectively). They also evaluated their pronunciation as good or slightly above. The group that turned out to be the most critical towards their pronunciation was the one teaching at lower secondary level, but the differences between these teachers and those belonging to the other groups were statistically non-significant, as measured with a t-test.

Table 3. The self-evaluation of teachers' pronunciation competences.

Self-evaluation of teachers' competences regarding pronunciation	Primary		Lower secondary		Higher secondary	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I am competent enough to teach English pronunciation	4.21	.69	4.15	.85	4.17	.87
My pronunciation is very good	4.21	.69	4.00	.77	4.26	.53

The results computed on the basis of the last part of the questionnaire provided evidence needed to respond to the third research question referring to some selected pronunciation teaching techniques used most/least often by teachers at three educational levels. For the declared frequency of the application of classroom pronunciation teaching techniques, the means and standard deviations were calculated. Additionally, an independent samples t-test was applied to compare the results between primary and lower secondary groups, primary and higher secondary groups, as well as lower and higher secondary groups. Table 4 shows the basic descriptive statistics for the reported use of 16 pronunciation teaching techniques at the three educational levels.

Table 4. The pronunciation teaching techniques used at primary, lower, and higher secondary educational levels (* statistically significant difference).

Pronunciation teaching techniques	Primary		Lower secondary		Higher secondary	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Repetition after the teacher	4.26	.71	3.95	1	3.78	.98
Repetition after recordings	4.26	.85	3.9	1.04	4.14	.64
Transcription	3.26*	1.07	2.43*	1.09	2.83	.96
Recognising phonemic symbols	2.74	1.16	2.33	1.28	2.35	1.09
Checking pronunciation in a dictionary	2.53	.94	2.24	1.06	2.65	.81
Minimal pairs	2.74	.78	2.38	1	2.86	1.14
Rhyming	3.79*	1	2.57	1.05	2.17*	1.09
Tongue twisters	3.21*	.95	2.71	.82	2.39*	1.01
Acting out dialogues	4.32	.73	3.95	1	3.91	.88
Reading aloud	4.17	.76	4.14	.94	3.83	1.05

Pronunciation teaching techniques	Primary		Lower secondary		Higher secondary	
Direct instruction	4	1.12	3.67	.99	3.7	1.08
Recognising sounds, e.g. same-different	3.84	.74	3.38	.95	3.24	.92
Elements of drama	3.26	.96	2.76	1.11	2.73	1.17
Guessing stress placement in words	2.67	1.11	2.62	1.05	2.59	.94
Imitation	3.17	.96	2.62	1.13	2.78	1.21
Voice recording	1.53	.94	1.48	.73	1.26	.53
Total	3.36	.77	2.95	.76	2.95	.75

Generally, the teachers teaching at the three educational levels stated that their use of pronunciation teaching techniques was neither high nor low in terms of frequency. Primary school teachers reported a frequent (the mean value above 4) deployment of acting out dialogues with their learners ($M=4.32$) and repetitions both after the teacher and recordings ($M=4.26$ each). They also often declared asking their students to read aloud and providing direct instruction regarding English pronunciation, for instance, explaining how to articulate th-sounds. The least frequently chosen techniques (the mean value below 3) at this educational stage were voice recording ($M=1.53$), checking pronunciation in a dictionary ($M=2.53$), guessing stress placement in words ($M=2.67$), practising pronunciation with minimal pair ($M=2.74$), and recognising phonemic symbols ($M=2.74$). Reading aloud ($M=4.14$) was the technique that was used most frequently among the lower secondary school teachers. Interestingly, no other means exceeded the value of 4 while reporting the frequency of the pronunciation teaching techniques used within this group. However, the list of techniques deployed comparatively rarely (below 3) contained as many as ten items. These were the following: voice recording ($M=1.48$), checking pronunciation in a dictionary ($M=2.24$), recognising phonemic symbols ($M=2.33$), practising with minimal pairs ($M=2.38$), teacher transcription ($M=2.43$), rhyming ($M=2.57$), guessing stress placement in words ($M=2.62$), practising pronunciation with the help of imitation ($M=2.62$), using tongue twisters ($M=2.71$), and exploiting elements of drama ($M=2.76$).

Similarly, in the group of higher secondary school teachers the pronunciation teaching techniques that were chosen less frequently outnumbered those that were used more often. Repetition after recordings ($M=4.14$) turned out to be most popular among EFL teachers in this group. The least frequently used techniques were voice recording ($M=1.26$), rhyming ($M=2.17$), recognising phonemic symbols ($M=2.35$), tongue twisters ($M=2.39$), guessing stress placement in words ($M=2.59$), checking pronunciation in a dictionary ($M=2.65$), using elements of drama ($M=2.73$), imitation ($M=2.78$), using transcription by the teacher ($M=2.83$), and minimal pairs ($M=2.86$).

Generally, the overall frequency of use of the investigated pronunciation teaching techniques was close to average. The primary school teachers reported

slightly more frequent deployment of the techniques ($M=3.36$) than the lower ($M=2.95$) and higher secondary ($M=2.95$) level respondents. Nevertheless, the difference was statistically insignificant.

A closer look at the data allows us to obtain a finer-grained picture of the declared deployment of particular pronunciation teaching techniques. In order to investigate whether the differences in the frequency of use of these techniques at the three stages were statistically significant, several t-tests for independent samples were applied between the results of primary and lower secondary teachers, primary and higher secondary, and lower and higher secondary teachers. The analysis yielded only three cases of statistically significant differences. The first one concerned using rhyming for pronunciation teaching. Primary school teachers reported using it significantly more frequently than the respondents employed in higher secondary schools (the t-test value reached 4.83, at $p<.001$). Tongue twisters were used significantly more often by primary than higher secondary teachers ($t=2.62$, at $p<.05$). Finally, a significant difference was calculated for the application of transcription by teachers at primary and lower secondary educational levels; the former used this technique more frequently than the latter ($t=2.37$, at $p<.05$).

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' beliefs and actions concerning pronunciation teaching at primary, lower and higher secondary state schools in Poland. The results presented above provide enough evidence to formulate the answers to the three research questions, the first of which focused on teachers' beliefs about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching at three educational levels. The results confirmed that teachers at all the investigated educational stages declared attending to English pronunciation. More secondary school teachers, in comparison to their primary school colleagues, asserted paying attention to their own pronunciation while teaching. This might be explained by the fact that this educational level creates a more demanding environment and higher expectations with regard to teachers' professional competences. Students at that stage are more familiarised with the target language that they have been exposed to in the course of earlier EFL learning. Therefore, being aware of that, the teachers may feel a pressure to be perceived as competent speakers of L2. In consequence, they focus more attention on their pronunciation than teachers at primary schools. Moreover, regardless of the educational stage, teachers reported that how their students speak English was important to them. This promising realisation has also been noted by Sifakis and Sougari (2005), whose primary teachers found it important for their pupils to attain native-like pronunciation. The EFL teachers also believed that teaching English pronunciation at school was important. Generally, their declared attitudes to pronunciation and pronunciation teaching were very positive. However, when it

comes to details regarding pronunciation models, the responses were not as optimistic. Teachers at primary, lower, and higher secondary level did not find it very important for their students to become familiarised with, be able to identify, or to use different pronunciation models. Unfortunately, this stands in contrast to the core curriculum guidelines, which at lower and higher secondary levels refer to L2 standard models. A learner who should understand utterances articulated in an L2 model needs to be familiarised with it first. Therefore, EFL teachers, those at the lower and higher secondary schools in particular, should feel obliged to introduce at least one standard model to their students.

The second research question concerns the perception of EFL teachers' pronunciation competence. Teachers at three educational levels agree that they are competent enough to teach English pronunciation and their pronunciation is good. Positive as they sound, these declarations should be approached with caution in the view of Henderson et al.'s (2012) research outcomes, which indicate insufficient pronunciation training in teacher training courses. Definitely, the teachers' responses might have been affected by the face-saving factor. In other words, in order to be perceived as competent professionals, the respondents might have opted for these answers that put them in a better light. Nevertheless, teachers' beliefs concerning attitudes towards English pronunciation and its teaching, as well as self-perceived pronunciation levels and competences, bode well for the role of pronunciation in EFL classroom.

Unfortunately, this positive image is not in line with the results providing the responses to the third research question on the use of pronunciation teaching techniques. The infrequent use of them at all three educational stages reveals a more genuine illustration of the place of pronunciation in Polish state schools.

Although the core curriculum is more concerned with outcomes, EFL teachers decide which techniques they need to introduce in the classroom in order to guide their learners to achieve these outcomes. For instance, if a teacher organizes acting out dialogues, then learners not only learn pronunciation but also learn to fulfil the core requirement of taking part in short drama performances. However, the use of the techniques generated on the basis of the guidelines for the primary, lower, and higher secondary levels has not been fully supported in the study. With the exception of acting out dialogues, which the primary school teachers report to use quite often, rarely do they choose to practise pronunciation with minimal pairs, which might lead their learners to distinguish words that sound similar, as stated in the core curriculum for the primary level. Or, they infrequently ask their learners to check pronunciation in a dictionary (these days multimedia dictionaries might also have been taken into account), which could result in the development of their students' abilities to use dictionaries and multimedia as suggested in the core curriculum for all levels. More traditional pronunciation teaching techniques, such as repetitions and reading aloud, are still strongly represented in the classroom.

One of these techniques, reading aloud, has been a controversial issue in the realm of EFL methodologies. Following Sobkowiak and Piasecka (2014), on the

one hand, it may trigger anxiety and the feeling of boredom, directing the attention of the reader toward articulation rather than comprehension of the text. On the other hand, reading aloud supports a teacher's diagnosis of pronunciation problems; it also helps in developing fluency and training learners' phonological awareness of L2 (cf. Sobkowiak & Piasecka 2014), defined by Pressley (2002) as "awareness that words are composed of separable sounds (i.e. phonemes) that are blended to produce words" (p. 106). In consequence, reading aloud may contribute to the process of L2 pronunciation acquisition. However, a word of caution is needed with reference to the procedure of introducing this technique in the classroom. An EFL teacher should allow the students to prepare for reading aloud, for instance, by giving them time or "looking through texts with them and discussing how sentences should be read" (Harmer 2012: 69).

A quick overview of those techniques that are rarely used at the three levels may direct teachers' and scholars' attention to how pronunciation is actually taught in Polish state schools. The primary school teachers reported infrequent use of the technique based on recognising phonemic symbols. This fact indicates several considerations that need to be addressed. The first one might be linked to teachers' uncertainty in applying transcription. The next one could refer to their convictions as to whether these symbols are useful to the learners in improving pronunciation. Finally, teachers might find this technique inadequate for the age of their students. Without further investigations the question why transcription is used so infrequently at schools cannot be answered. Other techniques rarely used at the primary level are guessing stress placement in words and practicing pronunciation with minimal pairs. The explanation may be connected with the inadequate number of pronunciation teaching aids dedicated to young learners and insufficient pronunciation learning tasks included in the course books that support teachers' choices of appropriate actions for pronunciation learning. Nevertheless, out of the three educational stages, the primary school teachers declare frequently selecting a number of pronunciation teaching techniques, particularly when it comes to using rhymes, tongue twisters, and word transcription, which they use significantly more frequently than the teachers at the other educational levels.

Lower secondary school teachers declared a long list of pronunciation teaching techniques that they rarely used. Apart from the techniques mentioned above, they additionally enumerated imitation and exploiting elements of drama. At this stage, the teenage learners enter a particularly vulnerable period of their lives. They are sensitive and frequently over-reactive due to hormonal changes. Therefore, the choices teachers make about, among other things, techniques of teaching, should be carefully selected in order to avoid unwanted peer reactions. In the case of imitation and using drama, such unpredicted reactions might occur, so this might be the reason teachers at this educational stage avoid these techniques.

At the higher secondary level traditional listen-and-repeat and reading aloud techniques were favoured, whereas transcription, rhyming, imitating, tongue

twisters, using elements of drama, and voice recording were least popular. Surprising as it might be, high school teachers did not seem to notice the potential of a number of techniques. For instance, the ability to use transcription may lead a student to a more autonomous language learning approach, and a warm-up activity based on tongue twisters may create a positive classroom atmosphere, indispensable for effective L2 acquisition. Unfortunately, the list of the techniques that are rarely used is long, which only confirms a miserable picture of the place of teaching pronunciation in Polish state schools.

A few limitations of the study need to be mentioned. Although the number of the participants was sufficient for quantitative analysis, the reliability of generalisations formed on the basis of the data would have been increased if more teachers had responded to the survey. Another limitation is that despite the request for sincere replies and assurance that the outcomes would be used only for scientific purposes, the participants might have been tempted to meet the expectations of the researcher and maintain their positive image as professionals, so they might have provided the answers that placed them in a favourable light as EFL teachers. The third limitation is the number of pronunciation teaching techniques recorded in the questionnaire. There were only 16 items chosen for practical reasons, but the author is aware that this list is by no means complete. Other pronunciation teaching techniques and open ended items, if included, might have revealed further details that would help to create a broader picture of the place of pronunciation teaching at the three educational stages in Poland.

6. Conclusions

The results of the study demonstrate that teachers may manifest somewhat contradictory beliefs about pronunciation teaching. On the one hand, teachers at all educational stages reported paying attention to their and their students' pronunciation. Their self-perceived pronunciation competence is satisfactory. Thus, they acknowledge the prominence of pronunciation and their professional abilities to teach it. On the other hand, the reported frequency of the pronunciation teaching techniques is low, which means that pronunciation teaching is a rarity in Polish state schools at the three educational stages. Although as many as 16 techniques are researched in this study, repetitions and reading aloud are those selected most often for pronunciation teaching. Therefore, it may be concluded that teachers' positive declarations and attitudes to L2 pronunciation are insufficient for implementing pronunciation teaching, and several actions triggering teachers' motivation to teach pronunciation in the classroom are needed. For instance, more attention might be given to pronunciation teaching in various teacher training programmes, which should aim at building trainee and in-service teachers' confidence in using pronunciation teaching techniques.

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