

## REFLECTING ON PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION IN THE POLISH ENGLISH CLASSROOM: LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

Pronunciation remains a controversial aspect of English instruction, both in theory and practice, with the dichotomy between “nativeness” and “intelligibility” (Levis, 2005) directing research into the exploration of learner and teacher views as to what they want to achieve, and, consequently, which elements of the English sound system should be included in language teaching and learning. Continuing a long tradition of questionnaire studies among Polish learners and teachers of English, this paper explores the presence of pronunciation instruction in the English classroom by inviting students who have chosen English as their BA major to reflect on their experience. The total of 70 students participated in a questionnaire study in which they were asked to reflect on whether they remembered pronunciation to have been included in their English instruction at different levels of schooling, and if it was, how it was taught and which aspects they remembered to have been practiced. They were also encouraged to provide comments and to share their views on the usefulness of instruction as well as to provide recommendations for pronunciation teaching and learning. The results show that pronunciation is only marginally present in students' learning experience, with a slight increase corresponding to the level of schooling and a growing preference for suprasegmental phonetics. While commenting on their experience, students stress the need for pronunciation practice, correction by the teacher and self-study to be included from the beginning of EFL education.

**Key words:** English pronunciation instruction, EFL pronunciation teaching and learning, segmental and suprasegmental phonetics in EFL, EFL learner reflections on pronunciation instruction

## 1. Introduction

The pronunciation in English as the second or a foreign language (L2) has attracted attention of many researchers over the years. The early studies concentrated on the acquisition of the English sound system by immigrants, specifying facilitation conditions for the target language learning, such as early age of onset or a positive attitude towards the target language community (e.g. Suter, 1976; Schumann, 1976). These studies naturally assumed that the aim of pronunciation learning was to achieve native-like pronunciation. Thus, what has been later called the “nativeness principle” by Levis (2005), has long been treated as an obvious element of language learning. A different approach appeared with the call for separating accentedness from comprehensibility, with intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 1995) gradually becoming the main alternative to the nativeness as the aim of pronunciation instruction. The most radical intelligibility-based proposal, English as a Lingua Franca Core (ELF) (Jenkins, 2000) suggested including a limited number of phonetic and phonological features of English required for communication between non-native speakers of English. The discussion as to whether the LFC proposal could be accepted in EFL instruction followed (see e.g., papers in Dziubalska-Kolaczyk & Przedlacka, 2005). While some practitioners of English phonetics and phonology endorsed the proposal (e.g., Walker, 2008), many others opposed it. The opposition was particularly strong in Poland, with many researchers claiming that the lack of theoretical or practical grounds for the proposed solution made it untenable. Without going further into the dispute, let us notice the prevailing nativeness trend among Polish pronunciation teachers and researchers (e.g., Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2015).

The basis for rejecting the intelligibility principle and the limited aims in pronunciation instruction proposed by LFC came from both the theoretical analyses (e.g., Sobkowiak, 2005) and the questionnaire study results conducted among Polish students majoring in English. The majority of these studies showed an overwhelming support for the “nativeness principle” (e.g. Janicka et al., 2005; Wach, 2011; Waniek-Klimczak, 1997; Waniek-Klimczak et al., 2015). In a number of studies, Szpyra Kozłowska and colleagues (Szpyra-Kozłowska et al., 2002; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2015) found support for the “nativeness principle” and the need for pronunciation instruction also among Polish high school learners, who proved to be aware of many phonetic and phonological features of English. Further support for the presence of pronunciation in language instruction comes from the Wrembel (2002) study, conducted among Polish teachers of English, who claimed that they regularly included many aspects of the English sound system in their teaching practice.

The above-mentioned studies provide a rather optimistic picture as to the attitudes towards pronunciation instruction in Poland. The overall impression might be that not only is pronunciation important at all levels of language education in Poland, it is also native-like pronunciation that is preferred as the aim of instruction.

However, this conclusion may be premature given the scarcity of more recent studies, which would reflect the change in time and context. Hoping to fill this gap, the present study aims to provide a different way of discussing the extent to which the sound system of English is included in the EFL school curriculum in Poland. A new generation of first-year students of English were asked to share their memories of English pronunciation instruction throughout their school experience and provide comments on their experience. The respondents are believed to be the best-suited cohort for the investigation of pronunciation instruction, as their choice of the course of studies proves their interest in the English language, which can be expected to provoke clearer memories of English instruction at the school level. However, before the actual study is discussed, earlier studies referring to the role of pronunciation in the Polish English classroom is explored.

## **2. Pronunciation in the Polish English Classroom**

The theory and practice of pronunciation teaching have long attracted attention of Polish scholars. Early studies (Waniek-Klimczak, 1997; Sobkowiak, 2002) were conducted among students of English as the BA level and showed a positive attitude towards pronunciation instruction. However, neither the aim of native-like pronunciation, nor the priority over vocabulary learning were found (Waniek-Klimczak, 1997; Sobkowiak, 2002, respectively). In fact, the results proved respondents to be very realistic: in the former study they stressed the need to communicate, in the latter one – they valued vocabulary over pronunciation, but not over grammar.

Later studies helped paint a broader and more varied picture. Students majoring in English were repeatedly found to favor native-like accents and to believe that pronunciation was important (e.g. Janicka et al., 2005; Wach, 2011; Pawlak et al., 2015; Waniek-Klimczak, et al., 2015). Interestingly, similar views were voiced by secondary-school learners and their teachers surveyed by Szpyra-Kozłowska, Frankiewicz and Gonet (2002). In a similar vein, Wrembel (2002) found that 96% of teacher respondents (n=90) teach pronunciation, devoting to the task from 5 to 15% of class-time. Teachers also declared that the textbooks they use included pronunciation exercises; 80% of respondents said they corrected pronunciation errors, and as many as 56% said they introduced phonetic transcription.

A slightly different picture emerges from the Polish responses to the European Pronunciation Teaching in Europe survey (EPTiES) (Henderson 2012 et al.; Waniek-Klimczak, 2013), with teachers claiming that although pronunciation is important (3.9 on a 1-5 EPTiES scale) and believed to be helpful in getting the message across successfully, it is not really taught at school. The reasons are complex: on the one hand, teachers believe English pronunciation to be easy for Polish learners, on the other hand, however, they say it is too difficult for young/elementary learners. Some comments point to the belief that what is

referred to as pronunciation teaching refers to the nativeness principles, i.e. aims to lead to a native-like accent, which teachers do not believe to be a priority, e.g.

[575] My students are more interested in communication than pronunciation,

[721] I believe Polish students don't have problems with pronunciation. Their pronunciation doesn't affect comprehension.

When pronunciation is taught, it is interesting to notice which elements of the sound system are practiced. The main dichotomy mentioned in the literature relates to segmental vs. suprasegmental features; the Polish studies report interest in both aspects, including the concern with dental fricatives and the distinction between long and short vowels as well as word-stress, stress in compound words and intonation. Interestingly, while the study by Szpyra, Frankiewicz and Gonet (2002) conducted among both secondary-school teachers and learners of English pointed to a relatively greater importance of segmental features, the study conducted by Wrembel (2002) among teachers of English at different school levels showed a greater relevance of word-stress than other aspects of the phonetics and phonology of English. The methods and the elicitation instruments undoubtedly had an effect on the results, as the former study was based on a list of features, while the latter one elicited responses from the teachers. Regardless of these differences, however, the two studies suggest major concern with those elements of the sound system of English that are known to be difficult for learners across first language backgrounds and included in major phonetics and phonology textbooks (e.g. Roach, 2004). The relevance of segmental vs. suprasegmental elements in English pronunciation teaching and learning has been studied on the basis of practical as well as theoretical considerations (see Wang, 2022 for a review). Interestingly, a list of priorities in teaching pronunciation for international communication, *Lingua Franca Core* (Jenkins, 2000) includes several aspects of syllable structure, vowel length and sentence stress but not, among others, word-stress, claimed to be "unteachable", and, consequently, not included in the priority list. This claim remains in contradiction to findings reported by the scholars investigating communicative success by learners in the English speaking environment (e.g., Derwing et al., 1998, Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2012).

The presence of pronunciation instruction and the elements of the English sound taught at different school levels are further explored in the study presented below. The main questions are if, when and how is pronunciation learning remembered and recommended by recent secondary school learners. The study aims to explore the reality of pronunciation instruction in Polish schools; by choosing to refer to the reflection and memory of the first-year students enrolled in the English program we hope to provide a meaningful perspective to the discussion of pronunciation instruction. The questionnaire study hopes to answer the questions as to whether the student do remember pronunciation to have been taught, and if so at which level of their schooling and with respect to which aspects.

### 3. The study

The study aimed to consider the extent to which students who had decided to choose English as their major at the university, recall pronunciation instruction at different levels of their school experience and if so, which elements of the system they remember practiced. The following research questions were formulated:

- (1) Do students recall pronunciation as an element of instruction in English?
- (2) Did the textbooks they used mention pronunciation (pronunciation exercises? Phonetic transcription ?)
- (3) Which classroom activities related to pronunciation did teachers use?
- (4) Which aspects of pronunciation do they recall being taught?
- (5) What are students' reflections and recommendations in connection with pronunciation instruction?

#### 3.1 Methods

The exploratory-descriptive nature of the study called for the design that would provide individualized data with the potential of generalization. Consequently, a questionnaire-based written survey containing closed as well as open questions, followed by optional oral structural interviews was chosen. The choice of the above data collection methods was motivated by the aim of the study, which hoped to provide a general picture as well as individual observations.

##### *3.1.1. Participants*

Participants were all in the first year of their English studies program and had taken phonetics/phonology and pronunciation classes for 6 week prior to data collection. The choice of this specific group of participants is motivated by their assumed interest in English (as manifested by the choice of the field of studies), at least a basic level of English phonetics/phonology awareness and a short time span between the end of their school instruction (May) and the time of the participation in the study (November the same year).

The participants were recruited from the students enrolled in the first year of English BA studies; 70 students (58 females and 12 males) volunteered to take part in the questionnaire study. The mean age was 20.3 (*SD* 1.84), with the mean age of English learning 6.5 (*SD* 2.2). 59% of students had additional English classes outside school, and their main additional sources of English included the Internet, travel, books/music/films and friends. The respondents went through the Polish education system with three levels of schools: primary (grade 1-6), lower secondary (grade 7-9) and secondary (grade 10-12). 14 students volunteered to take part in the follow-up interview (12 females and 2 males).

### *3.1.2. Instruments and Procedure*

The instruments used in the study included a written questionnaire and a structured interview script. The questionnaire included closed / open questions in the biographical / background experience part asking about the school and out-of-school experience with English, a 4-point Likert scale reaction to statements in the second part and open questions in the third one. The second part of the questionnaire elicited reactions to the following statements:

- (1) Pronunciation was included in my school instruction in English at primary / lower secondary / secondary education;
- (2) The textbook we used at ... level included pronunciation exercises / transcription in the vocabulary section;
- (3) The teacher at ... level (a) used phonetic transcription, (b) corrected our pronunciation, (c) asked us to repeat new words after her (d) used exercises from the textbook (e) used additional materials for pronunciation;
- (4) We practiced (a) vowels, (b) consonants, (c) words stress, (d) sentence stress at ... level; The Likert scale from 1 – strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3 – agree to 4 – strongly agree was used.

Open questions asked the following: (1) In your experience, has practicing pronunciation been useful? Give examples of activities you found useful; (2) Which ways of practicing pronunciation would you recommend? (3) Please reflect on your experience with please include a pronunciation, learning and the English language in general and share your thoughts.

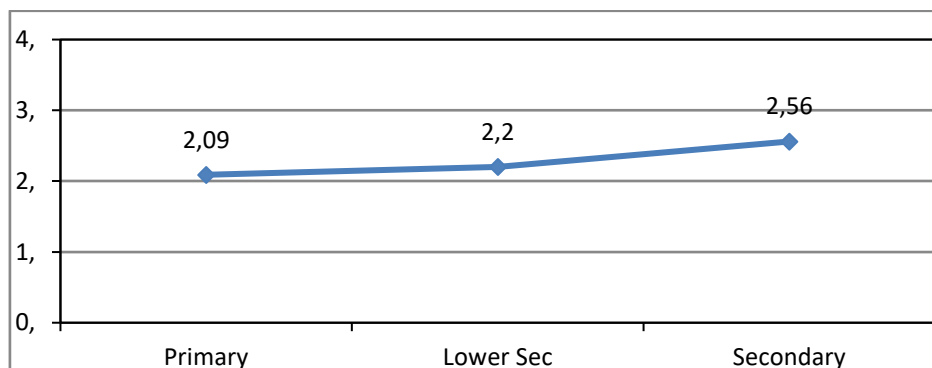
The written questionnaire was administered at one time to all the students who agreed to come and participate; all participants agreed for the results of the survey to be used for research purposes. The structured interviews that were aimed to supplement the written-questionnaire data were set up on individual basis with those students who on completing the written questionnaire expressed the wish to participate in the second part.

The data collected for the written questionnaire were analyzed for the mean values and standard deviation in the Likert-scale part; due to a relatively high level of variability in the data and the exploratory aim of the study no statistical analysis was attempted. The open questions eliciting students' comments were analyzed for the most frequently occurring themes. The analysis was performed in a bottom-up way, with the themes named as they appeared and then manual assignment of the statements with the themes. The data from the interviews was analyzed in the same way, i.e. the search for most often mentioned themes was conducted in a manual way.

### 3.2. Results

Results of the study are presented in two parts: firstly, the mean values of responses to the Likert scale statements are presented, then selected comments from the open question part of the questionnaire are cited and discussed together with insights provided by students in the course of the interviews.

The Likert-scale part of the questionnaire asked four major questions, each with respect to three levels of schools. The first one, most general, asked about the memory of pronunciation instruction being included as an element of EFL classes. The results (see Figure 1) show that although the mean value did rise for the secondary school level, the extent to which pronunciation is remembered as being practiced in the classroom is extremely low. Interestingly, with a slight increase in the mean values, the value of standard deviation also rises, from 0.77 for a primary school, through 0.8 for lower secondary to 0.86 for secondary, which additionally gives information on an uneven distribution and the tendency to include pronunciation in some schools, or more precisely, most likely by some teachers only.



**Figure 1.** Pronunciation was included in my school instruction in English

The second aspect of pronunciation instruction touched upon in this study is related to teaching materials. As many modern textbooks do include pronunciation exercises, it was interesting to check to what extent students recall them. Table 1 presents the mean values and *SD* values for the three levels of schooling. As can be observed, here again, the higher the level of schooling instruction, the better, however still marginal the results are. Interestingly, the presence of phonetic transcription in the vocabulary section, not noticed at the primary level at all, gradually grows, with the mean answers suggesting a low “yes” answer. With the mean values gradually increased the standard deviation values rise in the answer to the second part of the textbook question – both at lower secondary and secondary school level the transcription in the vocabulary section is remembered by some students more than others, and the picture is not clear. On the whole, however, the increase is greater with respect to transcription than the pronunciation exercises as such.

	Primary		Lower Secondary		Secondary	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Textbook contained pronunciation exercises	2.06	0.77	2.2	0.74	2.46	0.84
Textbook contained phonetic transcription in vocabulary section	1.84	0.89	2.34	0.92	2.74	0.95

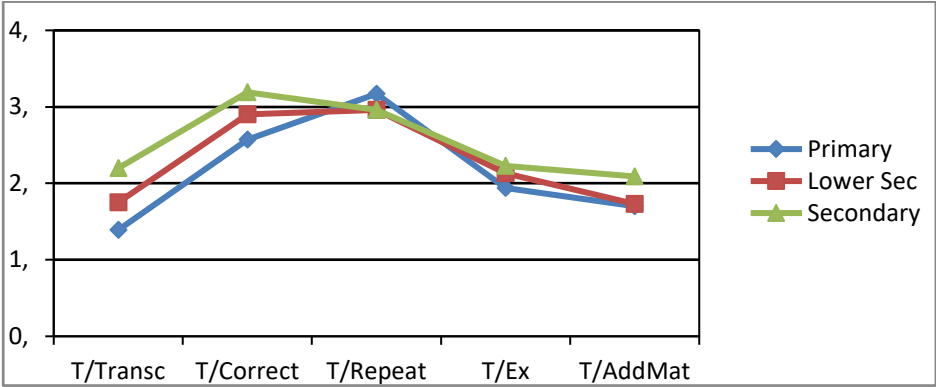
**Table 1.** The mean values and *SD* for the answers to Question (2).

The third aspect, the memories of the teachers' involvement in pronunciation instruction, brought more varied results. As can be seen in Figure 2, the correction of pronunciation by the teacher and the teacher asking the learners to repeat new words after her are the most frequently used techniques across the school levels. The results suggest the preference for the direct teacher-learner interaction rather than the use of pronunciation exercises from the book or additional materials. The *SD* values suggest that the use of transcription by the teachers is most varied and similarly to the memories of the presence of pronunciation instruction clearly depends on the teacher (see Table 2).

	Primary		Lower Secondary		Secondary	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Used phonetic transcription	1.39	0.88	1.75	0.64	2.2	0.95
Corrected pronunciation	2.57	0.59	2.9	0.67	3.19	0.86
Asked to repeat new words	3.17	0.77	2.96	0.80	2.96	0.68
Used exercises from the textbook	1.94	0.75	2.13	0.80	2.23	0.68
Used additional materials	1.7	0.76	1.73	0.72	2.09	0.84

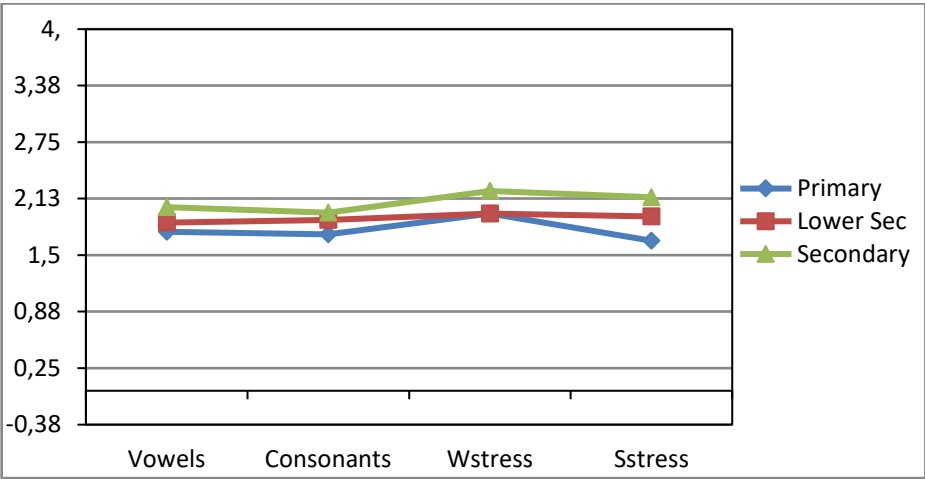
**Table 2.** The mean values and *SD* for answers to question (3). The teacher....





**Figure 2.** Teacher used phonetic transcription / correction / repetition / exercises from the textbook / additional materials.

The last part of the Likert-scale questionnaire focused on the content of pronunciation instruction – if it was used at all. General segmental categories of vowels and consonants vs. suprasegmental ones of word stress and sentence stress were included and the use of metalanguage was believed to be justified by the phonetics / phonology basic experience of the respondents during their initial 6 weeks of English tertiary level studies. The responses (see Figure 3) show that none of these aspects was really practiced; if at all, then words stress and sentence stress were remembered as marginally present at lower secondary and secondary school EFL instruction. With *SD* in the range between 0.68 to 0.86, students are far from unanimous in their responses. However, even given the prediction that some teachers are remembered as introducing some type of pronunciation practice, it happens mostly at higher levels and with respect to suprasegmentals rather than segmental features.



**Figure 3.** We practiced vowels / consonants / word stress / sentence stress at school

The final part of the questionnaire asked students to provide further comments in the form of answers to open questions. The first one: "In your experience, has practising pronunciation been useful? Give examples of activities you found useful.", provoked interesting reaction, starting with the following:

[1] *they were needed but they were not there or*

[53] *we never practiced, sometimes the teacher corrected someone who's made a major mistake.*

Repeating after the teacher was mentioned most often, supporting the results of the Likert scale declarations of the students. As to the usefulness of the activities, other comments included the following:

[40] *recognising differences between similar words,*

[20] *learning the language from the media and talking to native speakers,*

[21] *writing words in phonetic transcription and practicing reading them.*

The most frequent answer was summarized by respondent [48]: *listen and repeat.*

Commenting on which ways of practicing pronunciation they would recommend, students chose direct interaction in English and the use of the Internet; this is exemplified by the following excerpts:

[28] *watching films, talking in English.*

[48] *watching films on YouTube.*

[54] *talking to people in English.*

[41] *using pronunciation dictionaries for learning words.*

[53] *trying out pronunciation of words and then checking in the Internet.*

[52] *learning transcription, using YouTube, using textbooks with recorded exercises for transcription.*

[35] *repeating after a native speaker or a teacher / recording and comparing your pronunciation.*

[25] *learning with the Internet.*

When asked to reflect on their experience with pronunciation and to share their thoughts regarding learning English in general, they stressed the need for the practice of pronunciation from the early age; this is seen in the following comments:

[40] *Correct pronunciation needs to be worked on from the very beginning, similarly to the grammar.*

[1] *Teachers should pay more attention to pronunciation from the very beginning, because later it's much more difficult, there are many words we mispronounce*

*but nobody corrected us, and it's a pity we didn't practice pronunciation when we were small kids.*

*[36] Teachers should teach correct pronunciation from pre-school, later it is more difficult. [27] At earlier stages pronunciation should be a priority, later it's teaching for the exams.*

Some students voiced very strong opinions, e.g.

*[53] It's appalling to me that learners are not corrected at school, when they finish high school many of them finish their language instruction, and they will use English the way they learned, they will not be understood or will be misunderstood. Pronunciation should be taught at all levels, and at secondary level it should be obligatory.*

Other comments included the outside the classroom reality, pointing to the importance of learners' contact with English on the media. An interesting comments calls for the abandoning of a voice-over translation technique used by Polish television.

*[48] Pronunciation activities are needed at school, learners should have contact with learners from other countries, and Polish television should not use a voice-over or dubbing but subtitles.*

*[54] Teachers didn't pay attention to correct pronunciation, it was watching films and listening to the music that helped me in learning English.*

The second phase of the study was planned as a follow-up that we hoped would provide more in-depth comments in the course of semi-structured interviews. Contrary to our assumptions, however, the interviews did not contribute many new insights. In fact, students who volunteered for the interviews were the ones who had already expressed strong regret for not having had enough pronunciation instruction and not having been regularly corrected by their teachers, especially at the primary school level. Students also offered recommendations for successful pronunciation learning out of school, mentioning the Internet, online games, the use of online resources and recording their pronunciation on regular basis. Their comments offered in the course of the interview were a follow-up of their comments included in the questionnaire, and consequently, they were not considered as new data.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

The present study was conducted to explore the role of pronunciation instruction in the Polish English classroom as remembered by former school students with special interest in English, as proved by their choice of English major for BA studies. The first research question was most general and asked whether pronunciation was remembered as an element of instruction in English at all (RQ1). The answer proves

to be largely negative, with mean values rising slightly with the level of the school and learners' advanced proficiency. The tendency is associated with the parallel increase in variability, suggesting the effect of individual teachers or school environments on the role of pronunciation instruction. The overall picture, however, is rather grim: pronunciation is not remembered as being taught, and if it was, then only marginally, and at higher levels of schooling. Was this the result of the lack of reference to pronunciation in the textbooks used in the classes (RQ2)? The answers suggest that this may have been the cause, as according to the respondents, the textbooks they used contained virtually no (primary school) or very few (secondary) pronunciation exercises; interestingly, however, more students recall phonetic transcription in the vocabulary section in the secondary school textbooks. Naturally, classroom activities are not limited to textbook-based materials, and the most frequent pronunciation practice technique used by the teachers (RQ4) proves to be the repetition of new words and pronunciation correction by the teacher. The use of these two most frequently remembered techniques change with the level of school, with repetition decreasing, and correction increasing correspondingly (from 3.17 to 2.96 in the case of repetition and 2.57 through 2.9 to 3.19 for correction). Other activities (phonetic transcription, exercises from the textbook or additional materials) were remembered as much less frequent, and if used at all, then at the secondary school level. The element of the sound system which was practiced (RQ4) proves to word stress and sentence stress, both marginally, and at secondary school. As already mentioned, students are far from unanimous in their responses, however, the general picture is again far from optimistic. The lack of pronunciation instruction, particularly at the early stages of language learning, proves to be the major theme in the final part of the study, where students were asked to reflect on their pronunciation instruction experience and to offer recommendations (RQ5). With "listen and repeat" mentioned as the most frequent way of pronunciation teaching at school, students recommend the use of the media for language practice, but at the same time stress the importance of pronunciation instruction from the beginning, from pre-school; as one of the respondents put it [36] *Teachers should teach correct pronunciation from pre-school, later it is more difficult*. Another comment already quoted summarizes the attitude towards pronunciation exercises [1] *they were needed but they were not there*.

The above findings suggest a very different reality when compared to the studies mentioned in Section 1. In view of the results, an overall positive image of the role of pronunciation in the English classroom presented there cannot be upheld any longer. The data collected among teachers of English in Poland over 20 years ago suggested that from 10% to 15% of class-time was devoted to pronunciation practice (Wrembel 2002); teachers were also found to be either satisfied with the amount of time or declared they were ready to more time for pronunciation (Waniek-Klimczak, 2013). In contrast, the memories of students reported in this study do not support this optimistic tendency at all. With the general answer 'no' to the statement that

pronunciation was included in their school instruction, the data show that the majority of respondents had no experience of pronunciation instruction in their Polish English classroom. Those of them who did, mention pronunciation as an element of instruction at higher levels of schooling. With high variability, we can speculate the positive effect of individual teachers who would have paid more attention to pronunciation, there is no room, however, for the optimism reported in earlier studies.

One of the aspects of the study worth noticing in view of previous research is the connection between the schooling level and the attention paid to pronunciation. Most generally, the data suggest that the higher the level of schooling, the more likely is pronunciation instruction to be remembered. Not only was pronunciation marginally more often included at secondary level, but also the textbooks are remembered as having slightly more pronunciation exercises and, more noticeably, phonetic transcription was included in the vocabulary / textbook dictionary section in secondary school. Once again, the value of standard deviation indicates variability, increasing at the secondary level, particularly with respect to the use of transcription (see Table 1). The variability notwithstanding, these results differ greatly from the ones reported by Wrembel (2002), whose respondents claimed that 92% of textbooks they used contained pronunciation exercises. They also said taught phonetic transcription (56%) and corrected pronunciation errors (80%). In the study reported here each of those aspects appears to have been occasionally used (or used by some teachers) at a secondary rather than lower levels.

The segmental vs. suprasegmental aspects, studied here with respect to consonants, vowels, word stress and sentence stress, follow the trend, with secondary school being remembered as more likely to have included pronunciation practice in any of these aspects. Interestingly, however, it is the word stress, an aspect of suprasegmental phonetics believed not to be teachable, and consequently not included in the *Lingua Franca Core* (Jenkins, 2000), but also claimed to be crucial for intelligibility (Hahn, 2004) that is remembered best. Interestingly, word-stress opens the list of aspects mentioned by teachers as most important in Wrembel (2002) study, but not in Szpyra-Kozłowska, Frankiewicz and Gonet (2002), where learners pointed to the pronunciation of dental fricatives, long vs. short vowels and stress in compound words as most often practiced. In a later study, Szpyra-Kozłowska (2017) found dental fricatives again to lead as most problematic and present in pronunciation instruction, followed by stress in compound words and fast speech processes. The preference for segmental vs. suprasegmental aspects as more relevant in EFL is clearly impossible to be resolved or discussed at length here; however, the results of the present study suggest that if at all, it is the suprasegmental aspect that is remembered as being included in the English instruction – even if at the secondary school level only.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the study contribute to the body of literature devoted to the recognition of the reality of pronunciation teaching and learning in the English classroom in Poland. Unlike other studies, we adopted a reflection-based approach, hoping to learn more about the place and attitude towards English pronunciation, segmental and suprasegmental, from students who had been interested in learning English to the extent they had decided to choose English as their major. Having been made aware of the basics in English phonetic and phonology in the course of their BA classes, they look back at their school experience and report on a rather bleak picture, with pronunciation instruction virtually non-existent at the primary school level, and marginally present at the secondary levels. If present at all, pronunciation practice is based on ‘listen and repeat’ and occasional correction by the teacher, mostly noticed at higher levels of schooling. As for the segmental or suprasegmental aspects, learning word stress is remembered best, but again at high school rather than earlier on. Reflecting on these memories, students stress the need for introducing pronunciation practice early on in the process of English instruction and for regular contact with natural language. Thus, while neither segmental nor suprasegmental phonetics have been found to be much present in the Polish English classroom, the final conclusion is optimistic, as the young generation of future specialists in English express a positive attitude towards change and call for pronunciation to be included from the beginning of the English instruction adventure.

Having formulated the conclusion, we need to stress that the present study has a number of drawbacks and limitations. The methods of data collection, with closed Likert-scale questions in the written questionnaire, was based on a number of background assumptions, including the very notion of pronunciation instruction and the type of activities as well as the areas of the sound system taught at school. Our approach followed earlier studies, in which pronunciation was treated as one of the three aspects of the system of language (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation), which might have resulted in the positive responses associated with explicit pronunciation instruction. Focus on explicit pronunciation instruction was also strengthened by questions regarding textbooks and types of activities. However, the fact that “listen and repeat” was the most frequently remembered pronunciation practice proves that respondents included oral vocabulary practice in their understanding of how pronunciation was taught. The study was limited to a specific group of respondents, first-year BA students majoring in English, and consequently, their opinions may be expected to be not only more accurate, but also more critical than in the case of other students, who may have had different expectations at school.

Given a positive attitude towards pronunciation instruction in English in Poland reported in earlier studies, this study aimed to provide yet another perspective on this issue. We believe that reflecting on their experience,

experience learners who chose English as their major provide valuable insights, and even if their special interests may provoke them to be more critical with respect to their English instruction in general and in particular pronunciation as an element of this instruction that is largely missing. Further studies are needed to determine the extent to which pronunciation instruction is neglected by teachers, particularly at the primary school level. The discrepancy between the results presented here and earlier studies seems to call for further research in the area.

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