



Focus on teaching pronunciation at primary schools in Slovakia

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Abstract: Teaching and practicing correct pronunciation is often neglected in English language lessons. The importance of correct pronunciation is unquestionable as it is a fundamental feature of successful communication. For this reason, it needs to be taught and practiced right from the beginning of English language teaching, because young learners are the best recipients and often can achieve flawless-like pronunciation. This study investigates how teachers perceive teaching pronunciation at several primary schools in Slovakia, focusing on teaching techniques and materials used for teaching pronunciation, and aspects of pronunciation. Methods for collecting research data were observation and interview. Findings show that the most used teaching techniques are corrections, drills and songs, and that the most used materials are pictures and textbook CDs. Segmental aspects were practiced when learning new words, but without any particular attention to segmental features and supra-segmental aspects of rhythm were practiced by rhymes, chants and songs and no attention was paid to word stress. The study indicates that teachers pay attention to teaching pronunciation, but without particular focus on different features of pronunciation and using limited teaching techniques and materials.

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INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation is very important to include in language lessons as it is very difficult to learn due to the fact that spelling and pronunciation are different matters and there is very little connection between them. Speech sounds, word stress patterns, rhythm of speech and intonation can be quite different in the mother tongue of the learners and if correct pronunciation is not taught and practiced, the learners assimilate English pronunciation to the patterns of their mother tongue. This is also the case for Slovak learners that they often assimilate English pronunciation to Slovak patterns. The Slovak language pronunciation is more straightforward with very little variation between orthographic and orthoepic forms and the Slovak phonemic system, word stress, rhythm and intonation differentiate considerably from the English one. This can cause unintelligible pronunciation or confusion in communication, but the purposeful teaching and practicing can eliminate such problems. That is why we decided to investigate the stature of teaching pronunciation in English lessons at primary schools.

The English language is taught at all primary schools in Slovakia from the third grade. It used to be the compulsory foreign language until the school year 2019/2020, however it is still the most popular and demanded foreign language in Slovakia. Most schools offer English language classes from the first grade of primary school. The national curriculum recommends one lesson per week for the first and second grades and three lessons per week for the third and fourth grades. School curricula can modify the amount of lessons. The primary education in English language teaching should reach the A1.1+ proficiency level (SPU, 2015). Primary school age of learners is the best age to teach pronunciation, as young learners can acquire flawless pronunciation and the degree of difficulty increases with age (Gilakjani, 2011). Age is closely related to the theory of Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, Chomsky, 1967) which claims that children between the ages of 2 to 13 can achieve native-like pronunciation (Loewen, Reinders, 2011). Kráľová (2010) claims that learners of foreign languages are able to create additional phonetic categories and these abilities decrease with age. According to Tench (1981)

correct habits in pronunciation are crucial right from the beginning of English language learning, because if pronunciation is learnt badly, corrections in later stages can be exhausting and frustrating. The Slovak national curriculum follows the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) considering teaching pronunciation, which points out the potential problems in communication when phonemes from the mother tongue are transferred to the second language. It is problematic to unlearn automatically expressed mispronunciations and that is why it is recommended to teach correct pronunciation from the initial phase of learning, especially from an early age (CEFR, 2001, p.132). In the section on phonological competences it includes information about learners' capability to produce and recognize phonemes, syllables, word stress, sentence stress, intonation, rhythm, reduction of vowel sounds, weak and strong forms, elision, assimilation, and other phonetic features. Further recommendations are to expose learners to spoken authentic language, to imitate teachers or native speakers from the recordings, phonetic drilling, ear-training, tongue twisters, explicit teaching, phonetic transcriptions, reading aloud, etc. For these reasons, teaching correct English pronunciation should be one of the fundamental parts of English language lessons at the primary school level.

This research study looks into teaching pronunciation at primary school level in Slovakia, more precisely how English language teachers at primary schools deal with pronunciation teaching. We wanted to find out which aspects of pronunciation (segmental, supra-segmental) they pay attention to, if this attention is focusing on differences between L1 and L2 and how pronunciation activities are carried out, particularly, which teaching techniques and materials are employed in English language lessons.

Pronunciation teaching should be focused on differences between the L1 and L2 languages on both, segmental and supra-segmental level. Segmental features deal with segments (phonemes) of a language. The meaning of a word can change by substitution of phonemes. The number of English phonemes differs from the number of English letters. English Received Pronunciation has 44 phonemes (20 are vowels and 24 are consonants) and the number of letters is 26 (Underhill, 2005). In comparison with the Slovak language, there are 42 phonemes (15 are vowels and 27 are consonants) (Olosiak, 2007). The system of vowels is more asymmetrical than the system of consonants considering their quantity and quality. If learners do not create phonetic categories of the English language, then they assimilate sounds in their mother tongue, which can cause misunderstanding. Kráľová (2011) mentions some common mistakes connected to the assimilation of English sounds in the Slovak language. Slovak language does not have the phoneme /æ/ and if it is not learnt properly, it is often assimilated to /e/ by Slovak learners. Then words like man, pan, bad are pronounced as /men, pen, bed/, which consequently changes the meaning of the words. Similar cases are with absent consonants in Slovak, e.g. /w/, which is often assimilated to /v/. Words like wet, wiper, whale would be often pronounced with totally different meaning as /vet, vaipə, veil/. Because of such discrepancies in the phonetic repertoire of the two languages, it is very important to focus attention on such differences. The division of supra-segmental features of a language concerns three main areas: intonation, stress (word stress and sentence stress) and other aspects of connected speech influencing the speech by changing particular sounds in particular situations (Kelly, 2000). Regarding intonation, the pitch of the voice of the speaker may go up or down in the utterance, and it differs concerning the mood and content of the message. Stress is considered to be a degree of strength used when a speaker is saying the syllables within the words. There are several factors which influence the placement of stress, since in English language the placement of stress is not fixed. The placement is influenced mostly by number of syllables in the words and as well the morphological and grammatical categories. Within the phonological classification we need to keep in mind whether the word is a compound or a complex word. According to Roach (2009) stress in sentences depends on which word we want to stress. Concerning the other aspects of connected speech, there are some cases when sounds need to be added, omitted or replaced within the connected speech in order to make pronunciation easier. English supra-segmental features are very different from the Slovak

language. For example, Slovak word stress is fixed to the first syllable and Slovak learners have great difficulties learning the correct stress placement. When applying the Slovak word stress pattern of the first syllable stressed into English, there might be problems with intelligibility. For example, very common mistakes are when Slovaks put stress on the first syllable of the word hotel, where they pronounce /'həʊtl/ instead of /həʊ'tel/, or the word event, where they pronounce /'i:vent/ instead of /i'vent/. The difference is also in rhythm. Slovak rhythm is a syllable timed rhythm, while English rhythm is stress timed rhythm. Intonation is also different, e.g. in the wh- questions in English, the tone is falling, whilst questions in Slovak always have a rising tone. Also pronunciation mistakes on a supra-segmental level can cause misunderstanding; however it is important to mention that not all pronunciation mistakes influence the content of the message. Perfection of pronunciation including accent is an unachievable aim, however intelligibility is the aim in foreign language speaking. Intelligibility is what teachers should be focusing on in their English language classes, because if learners' pronunciation is not intelligible, then there is no communication. Kelly (2000) emphasises that teachers do not need to correct everything, but it is invaluable for learners to know about their mistakes, even if they do not have an impact on communication.

The reasons for teaching and practicing correct pronunciation are obvious, but it is also important to know the possible ways of providing pronunciation practice in classes. There are various suitable teaching techniques for pronunciation teaching and teachers should know how to use them. Correctly selected pronunciation teaching techniques can be the key to encourage learners to work on their pronunciation and they are helpful tools for teachers to make their pronunciation teaching organized and meaningful. The most suitable teaching techniques for young learners are drilling, minimal pairs, listening and repeating, ear training, tongue twisters, songs, rhymes, chants, phonics, reading aloud, recording pronunciation (Reid, 2016; Hudson, 2012; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, 2002; Morley, 1994; Pawlak, 2014; Levis, Sonsaat, 2018).

The topic of teaching pronunciation to young learners has been investigated in many countries. A research study done by Szyszka (2016) in Poland investigated by a questionnaire (N 79) the most common teaching techniques used by English language teachers. The results showed that most common teaching techniques used for teaching pronunciation at primary schools were listening and repeating, and reading aloud. Acting out dialogues, tongue twisters and rhyming were less used teaching techniques. Teachers recognised the importance of teaching pronunciation, but complained about the lack of teaching materials and exercises in their textbooks. Preferences of teaching techniques were investigated by Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) in North Cyprus. 103 English language teachers answered in the questionnaire that the most used teaching techniques were reading aloud, dialogues and transcription. Questionnaire (N 138) was also used in a study conducted by Benzies (2013) in Spain, who found out that the most common teaching techniques employed by English language teacher are listen and repeat, correction of mistakes and songs. Teachers also stated that inadequate importance is given to pronunciation exercises in textbooks. Another Spanish study conducted by Trgujeff (2013) was a combination of observation, content analyses of textbooks and survey. It revealed that most pronunciation teaching is connected with new vocabulary teaching and the most common teaching techniques were imitating, correction and reading aloud. The use of phonemic symbols was not observed. ESL programmes in Canada (Foote, Holtby, Derwing, 2011) were surveyed for the used teaching techniques and aspects of pronunciation used by 159 teachers. The most popular teaching techniques were considered to be minimal pairs (bingo and telephone games), repetition, recordings and the use of mirrors. Segmental features were mentioned to be trained more than supra-segmental features. Summarising this brief overview of research studies, it can be concluded that English language teachers used mainly teaching techniques such as listen and repeat, reading aloud, corrections or songs. More modern and specifically pronunciation focused teaching techniques were rarely used. Teachers recognised the need of pronunciation teaching and complained about the lack of pronunciation activities in textbooks. Segmental features were practiced more often than supra-segmental features.

Similarly to the before mentioned studies, we were also interested to find out which teaching techniques, but also materials and aspects of pronunciation were used by English language teachers in primary schools in Slovakia. Consequently the aims were to find out the state of English pronunciation teaching in primary schools, more precisely the teaching techniques, materials and aspects of pronunciation.

Based on the research aims, the following research questions were stated:

1. What is the state of pronunciation teaching in English language lessons at primary schools?
2. Which aspects of pronunciation (segmental, supra-segmental) are taught in English language lessons at primary schools?
3. Which teaching techniques and materials are used for teaching pronunciation in English language lessons at primary schools?

METHODS

The qualitative approach partially with quantitative summary of findings was chosen for this study, as it is able to go further into depth in the studied matter, since qualitative studies usually deal with a smaller sample, but go further in intensity of the analysis (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). Methods for collecting data were observation and interview. Observation is widely used in qualitative research and has a great strength in potential authenticity and validity of the data. A semi-structured scheme was created for collecting observation data. During the research process, data was collected and categorised, with the focus on common features, differences and relationship between them. 20 English language lessons at two primary schools from 10 different teachers were observed. The aim was to observe what and how pronunciation is taught during an English language lesson. To be specific, which aspects of pronunciation were taught, which teaching techniques and materials were used. Semi-structured interview with the ten observed teachers was conducted to collect additional data. In the interview, further matters arising from observations could be explored. Open-ended questions regarding the teachers' pronunciation teaching were prepared. Questions in the interview with teachers were focused on pronunciation teaching in their English language lessons, pronunciation teaching techniques, materials they use and the forms of correcting pupils' pronunciation mistakes.

For the data processing from observation and interviews, a system of categories and codes was created. Observation schedule and interview answers served for systematisation of final categories and codes for analyses, which increases the reliability of the data. The aim was to develop and open up the understanding of issues and to find relationship among the codes. The findings need to be assessed against the empirical materials and the answers are provided by coding and comparison (Flick, 2010). The way of checking reliability is to compare findings with other data, in this case observation and interview. Data collected from observation and interview were analysed and grouped according to created categories and codes, which were summarised in numbers in the provided tables and interpreted. The numerical summary of findings is secondary to the interpretations and they complement the whole picture of teaching techniques which were used, materials and features of pronunciation. Choosing the right coding methods increases reliability. The way of checking reliability is to compare the interpretation of findings. A triangulation of research methods is used to maximize the validity of the data by complementing or contradicting the findings. Individually, each method provides only a limited view of the complexity of situations, but by comparing, a holistic view is acquired (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). Findings from our observation and interview are compared and conclusions are drawn from these findings.

Criteria for selecting participants were: fully qualified English language teachers, teaching at primary school level, minimum 5 years experience. Even though there were exact criteria, the ten teachers were chosen by a convenience sampling (opportunistic sampling selecting from who is available and willing to participate) (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). The sample consisted of 10 female teachers in Slovakia. The observed teachers agreed to be observed in two lessons. The primary focus of this research were the teachers, however the participants of the

study were also 3rd and 4th graders of two primary schools. There were ten different classes observed by two lessons and these classes consisted of maximum 15 pupils in the age 8 – 10 years old.

All participants in this research (teachers and pupils) gave us a written informed consent, which was signed by the pupils' parents and the participating teachers. They all agreed to be the objects of the research voluntarily with rights to withdraw at any time. The names or other identifying characteristics are not used in any way which would publicly identify the participants. The copies of the report will be available to the participating teachers.

RESULTS

Observation analysis

Observer-as-participant observation of pronunciation teaching was carried out in the 3rd and 4th grades of two primary schools in Slovakia. 20 lessons taught by 10 teachers were observed. Observation sheets with the main areas of interest were used and also a technique of field notes was applied to capture the progress and what was happening in the lesson. The gathered data were categorized and coded. Three categories, each including several codes, were created: 1. Pronunciation teaching techniques (codes: drills/listen and repeat, minimal pairs, ear training, tongue twisters, songs, rhymes and chants, phonics, reading aloud, recording pronunciations and corrections), 2. Materials used for teaching pronunciation (codes: flash cards/pictures, CD/video, textbook, interactive board, PC/internet, blackboard, mirrors/diagrams/pictures of mouth), 3. Aspects of pronunciation (codes: random words and phrases, segmental, supra-segmental).

The first category 'pronunciation teaching techniques' consists of ten codes, which are represented by individual teaching techniques and their occurrence at the observed lessons. According to the gathered data the teachers preferred traditional pronunciation techniques, such as corrections, which were observed in every lesson. There is nothing wrong with teacher correction, if pupils subsequently repeat the correction after the teacher, and it is checked that the learners can pronounce words and phrases correctly. However in these cases, all teacher corrections happened via the teachers correcting pupils and not asking them to repeat correctly. Therefore correction, as was implemented, was not a well-used technique, as teachers did not pay sufficient attention to ensure correct pronunciation from their pupils. Teachers need to ask pupils to repeat the incorrectly pronounced words until the pronunciation is correct (Pawlak, 2014, Levis, Sonsaat, 2018). Correction does not belong to the most suitable teaching techniques for pronunciation, sometimes is even considered as controversial. However, when correction is used, the teachers should make sure that it is implemented thoroughly and their learners develop the correct pronunciation. Peer-correction was present during 5 out of 20 lessons when the teachers asked other pupils to say the wrongly pronounced words correctly. Similarly to the teacher correction, there was a lack of further repeating of correct pronunciation and repetition of correct pronunciation was not initiated. Self-correction was present in 3 lessons when pupils knew they mispronounced some words and they corrected themselves. Self-correction and peer-correction should be more encouraged, but repetition of correct pronunciation is a must, which is often neglected. The second most used technique was drilling, which was present in 18 out of 20 observed lessons. Teachers used drilling for individual words or sentences, where the teachers or recordings were the models for repetition. Teachers used individual or group repetitions. Drilling was used mainly with introduction of new vocabulary. Very popular were songs (17 out of 20), which is a very typical technique for young learners. Songs but also rhymes were used with TPR where pupils were dancing and moving. Even though songs and rhymes were used frequently, there was very little focus on correct pronunciation. Songs and rhymes were used more for entertainment and icebreakers, rather than pronunciation training. Less frequent were tongue twisters and phonics, which appeared in 7 out of 20 lessons. Phonics was used in connection to the textbook, which has a phonics part in every chapter. Teachers had not much knowledge about phonics, but did the exercises because

they were in the available textbooks. They also practiced on the interactive board, since a CD was provided which included such exercises. However, very appropriate tongue twisters for training pronunciation were rarely used. Even rarer were rhymes and chants and reading aloud, which are usually very effective for pronunciation training. Clapping and tapping were used when saying rhymes and chants. Recordings of pronunciation, ear training or minimal pairs were never used in the observed lessons.

The second category 'materials used for teaching pronunciation' includes seven codes. The coding was created based on the observed data. The mostly used teaching aids were flashcards and pictures, and these were used during 18 out of 20 lessons. They mostly represented objects for which the pupils must say the word which represents the object, subsequently learning by drilling, listening and repeating after the teacher. Using pictures and flash cards is very suitable for young learners as they need multisensory aids for learning new vocabulary. CDs and videos were used in 17 out of 20 lessons. These CDs and videos were part of a textbook and teachers liked to use them as they served as a pronunciation model, recorded by native speakers. CDs and videos were also used for drilling, listening and repeating. Textbooks were used mostly for teaching phonics, which included several exercises regarding this method accompanying the interactive board and PC. Textbooks were also used for reading aloud, connected with development of reading skills, reading comprehension and fluency. The blackboard was used for writing new words, after the teachers read them, and pupils could repeat the new words.

The third category 'aspects of pronunciation' includes three codes. All lessons included practicing single words or phrases. These words represented new vocabulary, were practiced by listening and repeating, drilling and corrections. Focused practicing of segmental features was present in 8 out of 20 lessons. They were represented by individual phonemes which were included in the phonics part of the textbook. Phonemes like /w/, /θ/, /ð/ or /ɜ:/ were practiced. Practicing of the mentioned phonemes is important as they are problematic for Slovak learners, because they do not exist in the Slovak language. They need to be learnt properly, otherwise learners assimilate them to similar phonemes of their native language. This assimilation can cause problems in understanding. Also consonant clusters such as /br/, /fr/, /gr/ were practiced. However, these consonant clusters are not valuable to practice, because such consonant clusters are common in the Slovak language. This indicates that teachers just follow textbooks without considering the appropriateness of the exercises. 8 out of 20 lessons included supra-segmental features. Supra-segmental features were practiced by songs, rhymes and chants. Pupils were listening and repeating, drilling, tapping and clapping by which intonation and rhythm were practiced. There was no attention paid to the word stress, which is very important for Slovak learners as the word stress in Slovak is always on the first syllable, and English word stress varies depending on many factors.

For better illustration, the results of observation are presented in the following table, where all categories and codes are displayed together with their occurrences in the observed lessons. This numerical featuring of the occurrences only complements the whole picture of the observed findings.

Interview analysis

The second tool of data collection used in this research was a semi-structured interview. Ten English language teachers, whose lessons were observed, were participants for the interview. All of them had more than five-years experience. For the analysis, a system of categories and codes was created based on the open-ended schedule used for the interview. Three categories, each including several codes, were created: 1. Pronunciation teaching techniques (codes: drills/listen and repeat, songs, rhymes/chants, reading aloud, corrections), 2. Materials used for teaching pronunciation (codes: flash cards/pictures, CD/video, textbook, interactive board), 3. Aspects of pronunciation (codes: segmental, supra-segmental). Data from the interview were collected to complement or contradict findings from the observations.

Table 1. *Observation analyses*

Categories	Codes	Presence
1. Pronunciation teaching techniques	Drills/listen and repeat	18/20
	Minimal pairs	0/20
	Ear training	0/20
	Tongue twisters	7/20
	Songs	17/20
	Rhymes/chants	2/20
	Phonics	7/20
	Reading aloud	3/20
	Recording pronunciation	0/20
	Corrections	20/20
2. Materials used for teaching pronunciation	Flash cards/pictures	18/20
	CD/video	17/20
	Textbook	12/20
	Interactive board	8/20
	PC/internet	8/20
	Blackboard	3/20
	Mirrors/diagrams/pictures of mouth	0/20
3. Aspects of pronunciation	Random words/phrases	20/20
	Segmental features	8/20
	Supra-segmental features	8/20

The first category ‘pronunciation teaching techniques’ includes five codes and these were created based on the teachers’ answers. All ten teachers claimed to use songs for pronunciation practicing. Songs are suitable for young learners and teachers like to use them as pupils can often perform the contents of the songs and they find them suitable for pronunciation practicing. As it was observed, songs were indeed very popular at the observed lessons, but more for entertainment or icebreakers rather than for pronunciation training. All teachers reported to use the teacher correction, that they themselves correct the pupils’ pronunciation. This depends on the activity, but if it is reading the whole text, teachers wait until the end and then they say which words were wrongly pronounced and they say them correctly. Seven teachers reported that some of their pupils can correct themselves immediately after saying the incorrect word. Only two teachers said to use peer-correction that they usually ask other pupils if there were any mistakes and what would be the mistakes. It was also noted earlier that teachers did correct their pupils, but rarely asked their pupils to repeat the correctly pronounced words or phrases. 7 teachers also mentioned to use individual and group drills for their pronunciation teaching. They claimed to use drills together with flash cards or recordings. Also 7 out of 10 teachers mentioned rhymes and chants for their pronunciation teaching. They accompany rhymes and chants with clapping hands, which helps pupils perceive syllables and correct word stress. Only 3 teachers reported to use reading aloud for pronunciation practicing.

The second category ‘materials used for teaching pronunciation’ includes four codes, which were based on the teachers’ answers. All ten teachers use textbooks for teaching pronunciation. Those teachers who use the textbook, which includes phonics, use these activities for phoneme practicing. These activities include underlining sounds, filling in sounds, recognizing sounds they hear. All teachers use textbooks for learning and practicing new vocabulary, which is usually drilled for correct pronunciation. Often chants, songs and rhymes accompany the new words. 7 teachers mentioned to use CDs and videos and they were also part of the textbook pack. Interactive board was mentioned by 7 teachers. Interactive board exercises were also used from the textbook pack. 5 teachers said to use pictures and flash cards. Also these were part of a textbook. It can be concluded, that all teachers used only text exercises and materials which came together with the textbook. No additional materials were used by the interviewed teachers.

The third category 'aspects of pronunciation' includes two codes. All ten teachers claimed that the most problematic parts of pronunciation are phonemes and they named the following /θ/, /ð/, /w/, /p/, /t/. From the mentioned phonemes only /θ/, /ð/, /w/ phonemes are important to teach, as they are absent in the Slovak language and can be problematic in communication. However the mentioned phonemes /p/ and /t/ are common Slovak phonemes and it is surprising that the teachers named these two phonemes. They named techniques such as drilling and repetition for practicing problematic phonemes. None of the teachers mentioned to pay attention to supra-segmental, which is not true, as in reality supra-segmental such as intonation and rhythm were observed. Probably the observed teachers were lacking knowledge in phonetics and phonology.

For better illustration, the categories and codes with the results from the interview are displayed in the following table. This numerical featuring of the occurrences only complements the whole picture of the findings from the interview.

Table 2. *Interview analyses*

Categories	Codes	Teachers
Pronunciation teaching techniques	Drills/listen and repeat	7/10
	Songs	10/10
	Rhymes/chants	7/10
	Reading aloud	3/10
	Corrections	10/10
Materials used for teaching pronunciation	Flash cards/pictures	5/10
	CD/video	7/10
	Textbook	10/10
	Interactive board	7/10
Aspects of pronunciation	Segmental features	10/10
	Supra-segmental features	0/10
Correction of mistakes	Teacher correction	10/10
	Peer-correction	2/10
	Self-correction	7/10

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

A triangulation, comparison of findings from the two research methods is used to maximize the validity of the data (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). Data from observation and interview confirm, complement or contradict the findings. Each method provides a limited view on the complexity of situations, but by comparing the findings from each method, a holistic view is acquired. Twenty lessons taught by ten teachers were observed and the interview was conducted with ten observed teachers. A system of categories and codes was created for data analyses. The categories for both research methods were the same.

In the first category 'pronunciation teaching techniques' it was found out from both, observations and interviews, that corrections, drills and listen and repeat techniques were the most common ways of teaching pronunciation. Corrections were observed in every lesson and all teachers reported to use this technique. Unfortunately, it was observed that teachers would just correct the pronunciation without asking pupils to repeat the correctly pronounced word or phrase. Peer-corrections and self-corrections were less used forms of correction. In such cases of correction without pupils repeating the correct words or phrases, means there is not sufficient pronunciation teaching and practicing. Songs were very popular with all teachers, but in choral singing it was difficult to observe correct pronunciation of pupils. Songs are very popular with young learners as a motivational factor, entertainment or ice breaker, make lessons more interesting, but were not specifically used for pronunciation training. A very popular technique was drilling and repetitions of newly introduced words and phrases. Rhymes and chants were also used together with clapping hands. All the mentioned techniques resulted from the contents

of the textbook sets. Specific and effective pronunciation teaching techniques such as ear training, minimal pairs or recordings were not part of the English language teaching.

In the second category 'materials used for teaching pronunciation' results from the interview and observations confirm that all participant teachers use textbooks and materials that come in the textbook set for their teaching. Apart from the textbook exercises, CDs and videos were the most used materials. There was missing some self-initiative to find and use some other resources (YouTube videos, quizzes, online games) to make pronunciation teaching more interesting. All the teachers just relied on their textbook sets.

The third category 'aspects of pronunciation' showed very interesting results. It was observed that most pronunciation teaching was focused on new words that came out of the textbook. The only segmental features practiced intentionally were the ones in the phonics section of the textbook. Teachers did not critically consider if the particular phonemes were suitable for Slovak learners. Practicing consonant clusters /br/, /fr/, /gr/, which exist in the Slovak language was pointless. One of the teachers even commented that practicing phonemes such as /p/ and /t/ is important with no explanation why it is so. These phonemes are common Slovak phonemes; there is no need to practice them. All teachers claimed to practice only segmental and not the supra-segmental features, which is not true, as it was observed that they practiced rhythm and intonation in chants and tongue twisters.

To sum up the findings, the research questions need to be answered:

1. What is the state of pronunciation teaching in English language lessons at primary schools?

The participating teachers included pronunciation teaching and practicing during their lessons, but only what emerged from the textbooks. They did not include any other materials or activities to make pronunciation teaching and practicing more interesting and focused on pronunciation differences. Teachers did not critically consider the need of pronunciation features that are missing in the native language of their pupils. They only followed vocabulary, exercises and songs provided by their textbooks.

2. Which aspects of pronunciation (segmental, supra-segmental) are taught in English language lessons at primary schools?

Most pronunciation teaching and practicing was including vocabulary and phrases from the textbook. Some random segmental and supra-segmental were practiced without any particular aim. Activities from the phonics part of the book were also practiced without the teachers' consideration of the appropriateness for the Slovak learners.

3. Which teaching techniques and materials are used for teaching pronunciation in English language lessons at primary schools?

The most common teaching techniques were correction, drilling, listening and repeating, songs and rhymes. The mentioned teaching techniques were not always used appropriately for pronunciation teaching and practicing, because teachers did not always ask pupils to repeat words and phrases until pupils could pronounce them correctly. All activities were based on the textbook and materials that came with the textbook.

It can be concluded that the participant teachers focused on pronunciation but without any real aim to improve certain problematic features. They only used textbooks and materials from the textbook set. They practiced pronunciation of words, chants, phrases, songs, rhymes which were included in the textbook. Teachers did not use any other materials. It can be concluded that the observed teachers do not fully understand what pronunciation teaching and practicing involves. They did not differentiate between segmental and supra-segmental features, did not critically consider what their learners needed and what was necessary. All teacher trainees have to absolve a course on phonetics and phonology and teaching methodology focusing on teaching pronunciation during their university studies. That is why it is surprising that in-service teachers do not have enough knowledge on what and how to teach. They seem to have all slipped into the rigid textbook teaching method. Even though there are compulsory courses on phonetics and phonology and methodology of teaching pronunciation, it is obviously not enough

and the courses need to be reconsidered with the aim to emphasise the importance of pronunciation teaching.

It is very interesting to compare the findings from our research with the findings from the before-mentioned studies. We can conclude that our findings are very similar to the mentioned studies concerning the most common teaching techniques. All research studies show that the most common teaching techniques are listen and repeat, reading aloud, corrections or songs. And that the most attention is paid to the segmental features of pronunciation. Findings from our research together with other research studies from several European countries prove the claims of many scholars, that pronunciation teaching is a long time neglected part of English language teaching.

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