

“UNDERSTAND AND BE UNDERSTOOD”:
English pronunciation teaching in Finnish upper
secondary schools assessed by university students of
English

Bachelor's Thesis

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English
January 2016

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| Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta | Laitos – Department Kielten laitos |
| Tekijä – Author Elina Puskala | |
| Työn nimi – Title ”Understand and be understood”: English pronunciation teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools assessed by university students of English | |
| Oppiaine – Subject englanti | Työn laji – Level kandidaatintutkielma |
| Aika – Month and year tammikuu 2016 | Sivumäärä – Number of pages 26 + 3 liitettä |
| <p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vaatimukset englannin kielen monipuoliselle osaamiselle ovat kasvaneet muun muassa kansainvälistyvässä työelämässä. Sen vaikutukset ulottuvat myös jokapäiväiseen elämäämme: englanti näkyy ja kuuluu kaikkialla. Tämä asettaa koulutukselle paineita tuottaa yhteiskuntaan kielellisesti päteviä osaajia ja yhtenä lukion opetussuunnitelman kieltenopetuksen tavoitteena onkin laaja kommunikatiivinen kielitaito. Suullisten taitojen arvostus ei ole kuitenkaan juuri näkynyt käytännössä kielten kurssisisällöissä; suurena syynä tähän on suullisen osuuden puuttuminen kielten ylioppilaskokeista.</p> <p>Suomessa sekä englannin ääntämisen opetus että sen tutkiminen ovat jääneet vähemmälle huomiolle. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten yliopiston englanninopiskelijat mieltävät englannin ääntämisopetuksen entisissä lukioissaan. Tutkimuskysymykset koskivat ääntämisen opetusta yleisesti, opettajien ääntämistä ja opetusmetodeja, koulussa ja sen ulkopuolella tapahtuvaa oppimista sekä foneemisen kirjoituksen käyttöä. Lisäksi vastaajilta kysyttiin mielipiteitä ylioppilaskokeen suullisesta osiosta ja suullisten kurssien lisäämisestä lukion opetussuunnitelmaan. Tutkimus toteutettiin kyselynä, johon vastasi 29 Jyväskylän yliopiston opiskelijaa. Vastauksista laskettiin prosentuaaliset osuudet ja ne muutettiin taulukoiksi SPSS-ohjelmistolla.</p> <p>Tuloksista käy ilmi, että opiskelijat olisivat halunneet enemmän ja parempaa ääntämisen opetusta. Opettajien ääntämiseen oltiin tyytyväisiä, vaikkakaan ne eivät toimineet malleina opiskelijoiden omalle ääntämykselle. Opettajien ääntämisen testaamista opettajankoulutuksessa kannatettiin. Ääntämisen opetuksessa käytetyt metodit olivat usein perinteisiä ja mekaanisia. Enemmistö vastaajista oli oppinut ääntämistä enemmän koulun ulkopuolella kuin koulussa. Ääntämistä ei ollut rohkaistu harjoittelemaan vapaa-ajalla eikä siihen ollut annettu tarpeeksi mahdollisuuksia oppitunneilla. Foneemista kirjoitusta ei ollut hyödynnetty tarpeeksi ja sen käytön hyödyllisyydestä oltiin epävarmoja. Suullisten kurssien lisäämiseen ja ylioppilaskokeen suulliseen osaan suhtauduttiin myönteisesti ja näiden sisällöissä toivottiin painotettavan enemmän oman tuottamista ja keskustelutaitoja. Näitä tuloksia voidaan käyttää apuna esimerkiksi lukion opetussuunnitelmien laatimisessa ja aineenopettajakoulusta kehitettäessä.</p> | |
| Asiasanat – Keywords pronunciation teaching, EFL, Finland, phonemic script | |
| Säilytyspaikka – Depository | |
| Muita tietoja – Additional information | |

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1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays English can be seen and heard everywhere in Finland. It is needed in working life and used on media, leisure activities and everyday communication. English can also be picked up through these ways of indirect learning and it is often blended into Finnish by using loan words and expressions (see Leppänen et al. 2009). English, among other languages, is studied widely and it is the most common foreign language in Finnish schools (Tergujeff 2012: 599). Enabling students to acquire extensive communication skills in languages is one of the objectives of the upper secondary school curriculum, but this has not been realised in course goals (Takala 1993: 39). For this reason more attention ought to be paid to oral proficiency in language teaching.

Pronunciation is a salient part of oral proficiency: in oral communication, it is one of the first aspects which the listener is exposed to. The speaker gives the first impression of their language skills by their pronunciation, which can lead the listener to evaluate the speaker's entire language proficiency (Iivonen 2002, cited in Lintunen 2004: 1). In addition, an individual's pronunciation may reveal their first language and their social background (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994: 9; Rogerson-Revell 2011: 4-5). Thus an accent has a strong effect on one's identity and social status.

There have been few studies of learning oral skills and especially pronunciation, which has been neglected despite its importance in language skills. Moreover, usually the students' opinions and perceptions have not been asked as the foci of the studies tend to be on the teacher (Yli-Renko 1991: 25). Even so, to mention a few, Tergujeff has made extensive research on pronunciation via classroom observations, interviews, surveys and textbook analyses in Finnish schools, and Lintunen (2004) studied using phonemic transcription for learning pronunciation.

I decided to examine how university students assess the teaching of pronunciation in Finnish upper secondary schools. The participants were chosen to be university students of English rather than upper secondary level learners of one or two schools to get a more representative sample of the institutions around Finland.

In the following sections I will present some of the main ideas and research findings of pronunciation teaching of English, after which I will move on to report on the present study.

2 PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at school usually starts in the third grade of primary school, when pupils are nine years old. This way most of the Finnish students have studied English for nine years by the end of upper secondary school.

One of the goals of the upper secondary school curriculum is to provide students with wide communication skills in languages (Yli-Renko 1991: 35; Takala 1993: 39). Nevertheless, teaching those skills has suffered from the washback effect of the matriculation examination at the end of upper secondary school; at the time being, the language exams do not have oral parts, which shows in the lack of teaching pronunciation and oral skills in general. Teachers might feel that it is not worthwhile to teach pronunciation since it is not tested in the final exam. The matriculation examination's section focusing on grammar does not assess structures of spoken language, and the listening comprehension part tests them only passively (Lintunen 2004: 230). Nonetheless, Tergujeff (2012: 605) reveals that even the receptive skills, such as listening comprehension, are seldom practised in upper secondary schools.

It has been said that with the present language teaching the students' oral skills would not even be sufficient for succeeding in an oral part in the examination (Yli-Renko 1991: 56). According to Takala (1993: 39, 41), oral skills are not emphasised enough in course goals or evaluation instructions, and supplementary education is needed on teaching and assessing oral proficiency. Therefore, the teaching of oral skills ought to be included and integrated more in language courses so that testing of those skills would be relevant. Takala (1993: 33) speculates that if there is another way of creating a sufficient and prestigious status for oral skills, it would not be mandatory to have an oral part in the matriculation exam, but he notes that usually it has been achieved by having these skills tested.

2.1 Teachers' pronunciation and teaching practices

The lack of testing and evaluation shows in pronunciation's role in textbooks and teaching practices in Finland. Tergujeff (2013: 85) reports that the number of pronunciation tasks is scarce in EFL textbooks. She also points out that the observed teaching practices were very customary: 'mostly imitation and reading aloud'. This notion is supported by her previous

research (Tergujeff 2012: 605), where imitating and correcting made by teachers were the most frequent practices. Variation was found between the teaching methods, but generally they were all traditional, practical and teacher-led. Thus the tasks tend to be mechanical and are not followed by controlled practice or communicative activities (ibid.). These findings indicate that the teaching of pronunciation in Finnish upper secondary schools is rather slight and old-fashioned.

Rogerson-Revell (2011: 237) suggests some of the reasons why pronunciation teaching tends to be neglected by teachers. Firstly, phonetics and phonology might seem too abstract and detached from real-life classroom settings. Secondly, teachers can be unsure or unaware of the outcomes of pronunciation teaching. Thirdly, the skills and knowledge needed in teaching pronunciation may not be acknowledged by educators in teacher training. Thus, in order to improve the status of pronunciation teaching in schools, its effects, aspects of application and teacher training should be taken into account.

Lintunen (2004: 229) states that the university is accountable for guaranteeing that students graduate as proficient teachers. He goes on to say that, to achieve this, it is necessary to have 'good pronunciation courses and resources' in addition to feedback given by a competent teacher. In other words, to have qualified teachers, they must be taught and master the same issues they are going to teach to their pupils. Students, or future teachers, must be capable of producing language also on the phoneme level, distinguish mistakes from correct forms, and produce sounds in a way that they can provide a pronunciation model for their pupils (Lintunen 2004: 36). Ideally, teachers should know how to pronounce and teach the pronunciation of every word in English, which can be a major challenge (ibid. 229). On the other hand, Rogerson-Revell (2011: 211) notes that students also need help with identifying poor pronunciation and finding motivation in order to progress.

According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 128), it is an essential part of the teacher's proficiency to understand both the production of sounds, that is phonetics, and the sounds of the first language (L1) and the target language, which make up phonology (see also Lintunen 2004: 229). Rogerson-Revell (2011: 41) also emphasises awareness of this and moots that acknowledging these aspects makes it possible for teachers to help their students overcome issues with articulation. Therefore, efficient pronunciation teaching requires accurate description of sounds and understanding of the possible problems or negative transfer that L1 can cause when learning a foreign language.

Teaching pronunciation, nonetheless, demands more sensitivity than other language areas. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 6) point out that teachers should not aim at creating patterns for imitation so much as providing 'models of guidance'. By this they mean that language learners ought to be involved in pronunciation learning and producing speech, rather than simply repeat structures. Moreover, pronunciation learning is linked with identity and attitudes as it involves altering students' accents (Rogerson-Revell 2011: 240). Teachers need to be aware of this and take it into account in their teaching.

2.2 Learning pronunciation in and out of classroom

Pronunciation, and speaking skills in general, were the aspects that most lacked sufficient coverage and practice in Finnish schools, according to university students of English (Pietilä 1999: 13-14, cited in Lintunen 2004: 3). Yet the students had high levels of oral proficiency, which leads us to assume that they must have acquired their good speaking skills outside of school. Also Tergujeff (2013: 90) found that some of the students had decided to learn pronunciation self-imposedly out of class.

Rogerson-Revell (2011: 19) points out Krashen's theory of comprehensible input and infers that it could be significant for pronunciation learning as well to be exposed to the target language. Moreover, she moots that it would be beneficial to use also electronic media in addition to face-to-face communication in pronunciation teaching. In Finland, English music and television programmes have been traditionally popular; thus, English is commonly learned through these two media in particular, even though it might not be acknowledged as non-institutional learning (Leppänen et al. 2009: 81). Music, TV and films, popular culture and electronic media are indeed crucial in Finns' lives when it comes to being exposed to English. For instance, watching films or TV programmes with or without subtitles and listening to music or radio talkshows are the most frequent ways of hearing English (ibid. 93-94). Therefore, in Finland it is generally effortless to train the receptive side of pronunciation, since Finns are surrounded by English in their everyday lives (see e.g. Leppänen et al. 2009).

As it is indicated in Leppänen et al. (2009: 88), most Finns acquire their English language skills either at school or equally in and outside of classroom, even though one fifth of Finns had learned their English mostly or solely out of class. This implies that despite Finns' English proficiency comes mostly from institutional education, out-of-class learning plays an important part in learning EFL, too. Over half of the respondents reported that they

use English also in their spare time (*ibid.* 93). As stated above, Finns are willing to use English, even when they necessarily do not need to, and this tendency results in active language learning outside of schools. However, it would be 'impossible not to learn pronunciation at school', as pronunciation is connected to all areas of language learning by its nature (Tergujeff 2013: 90).

2.3 Pronunciation and phonemic transcription

According to Lintunen (2004: 10, 14), transcription systems can be considered as forms between speech and writing. He explains that phonemic transcription is based on phonology and it makes use of phonemes and allophones, while phonetic transcription is more detailed and it aims to be more concrete in description. The aim of both transcription systems is to represent speech with written symbols, but phonemic transcription, which Lintunen uses in his study, is the system that resembles more writing than speech. However, as Abercombie (1967: 127, cited in Lintunen 2004: 13) describes, 'transcription records not an utterance but an analysis of an utterance'. Therefore, transcriptions are solely attempts to describe the original utterance, which may not perfectly correspond to the source (Lintunen 2004: 13).

One of the agendas for creating the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was to create a way of teaching pronunciation (Lintunen 2004: 34). Usually phonemic transcriptions that bear resemblance to IPA are used in a variety of dictionaries and English textbooks, although they might slightly vary depending on the authors (*ibid.* 20). Tergujeff (2012: 604) found that phonemic script and transcription tasks were used solely by one teacher. Similar results were found by Lintunen (2004: 187-188): nearly four students out of five reported not having been taught transcription symbols before university. He continues by saying that although these symbols are included in all course books used in upper secondary schools, they are often left uncovered. Thus, even though plenty of material related to phonetic training and phonemic script can be found in Finnish textbooks of English, they have been very scarcely presented in teaching in previous research (Tergujeff 2010, cited in Tergujeff 2012: 604).

Lintunen (2004: 183) reports that students have often expressed having difficulties with learning transcription, but also some of them have felt that it is helpful in the learning process of pronunciation. In general, one would think that using phonemic script ought to be beneficial for Finnish-speakers, as Finnish sounds and letters have close correspondence which is not so common in English (Lintunen 2004: 65; Tergujeff 2013: 87). Nonetheless,

Tergujeff (2013: 88) suggests that whether using phonemic script suits a learner or not might depend more on personal preferences and learning styles.

Rogerson-Revell (2011: 243) lists some of the most prominent advantages of using phonemic script; for instance, it demonstrates the sound-spelling correspondence (or lack of it) and variety of phonemes in English. It also shows the pronunciation differences between connected speech and words produced in isolation, and makes it possible to refer to certain sounds, such as the schwa. Lintunen (2004: 186) found that in most cases phonemic transcription improves learner's pronunciation and transcription symbols were easily understood. Therefore it can be said that, even though learning transcription can be challenging and time-consuming, most students feel that it is needed and worthwhile.

3 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of my study was to identify what students studying English at a university in Central Finland think of the English pronunciation teaching in their former upper secondary schools. I examined how the quality and amount of teaching, teaching methods and teachers themselves affect learning pronunciation and whether these factors are adequate. My research questions were the following:

1. How do the students evaluate the pronunciation teaching they received?
2. What kind of effect do the teacher and teaching practices have on learning pronunciation?
3. What is the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning of pronunciation?
4. What are students' perceptions on using phonemic script in upper secondary schools?

4 DATA AND METHODS

4.1 The participants

The data was collected by using a questionnaire in a Finnish university in May 2015. The questionnaire was conducted in three separate English course lessons, which included two basic studies groups (11 and 14 respondents) and a Bachelor's thesis seminar group (four

respondents). This way the data was versatile and consisted of students both majoring and minoring in English. Out of 29 respondents, 22 were female, six were male and one was unidentified. The respondents were aged between 19 and 30, and they were originally from all over continental Finland. Most of them (17) were in their first year of studies. There were also two second-year students, eight in their third year of studies, one fifth-year student and one sixth-year student. 21 participants were majoring in English, six in Romance philology and two in Russian. I chose to study university students' perceptions since they have the needed understanding of language and basic concepts of linguistics, and they are capable of evaluating the teaching they had received in upper secondary school.

4.2 The questionnaire

I chose to gather the data by conducting a quantitative study and composed a questionnaire. That way I thought I could have a sufficient amount of data and many respondents at the same time. Alternatively, an interview could have been conducted in order to have more in-depth answers. With this in mind, open questions were also included to give the respondents a chance to share some of their experiences and opinions related to the topic, which might not have appeared otherwise in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with four peers, after which part of the instructions and some of the statements were edited.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1, English version in Appendix 2) consisted of three parts and it was conducted in Finnish to make sure that the respondents would comprehend it as well as possible. The first part included the instructions in which the purpose of the study and the answering system were explained. In the second part I asked about the respondents' gender, age, major subject, starting year of their university studies and the name and city of their former upper secondary school to find possible correlations. Respondents were asked to consider their English teachers in the upper secondary school when replying to the questions. They were given a 10-minute time frame to answer. In the basic studies lessons, I was present in the classroom the whole time in case the respondents had further questions, and explained the instructions orally as well. In the Bachelor's thesis seminar the teacher of the group conducted the questionnaire for me.

The third part was a five-point Likert-scale (1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree) with a possibility to tick 'No opinion' if the respondent had no opinion on the statement. The statements, altogether 23, dealt with the teaching of English pronunciation the students had

received, their teachers' pronunciation, the upper secondary school curriculum, the oral part of the matriculation examination, the phonetic script and the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning of pronunciation. The respondents were asked to choose the response alternative that most closely reflected their opinion on the statement.

The last part of the questionnaire contained three open questions aimed to explore the effects of pronunciation teaching practices on students' learning, ideas about the oral part of the matriculation exam and students' opinions about the topic.

5 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON PRONUNCIATION TEACHING

In this section I will present the results and analysis of the present study. It consists of five parts, each of which includes the statements of the given category. For each statement, percentages were calculated and these percentages were transferred into graphs by using SPSS, a statistical analysis programme. Figures that were the most representative of the themes of the research questions were chosen to be presented in this section; the other figures are in Appendix 3. Examples of the most illustrative answers to the open-ended questions are going to be provided as well.

5.1 Evaluation of pronunciation teaching

This section contains the theme of the first research question about how the respondents, Finnish university students of English, perceive the pronunciation teaching of English they received in their former upper secondary schools.

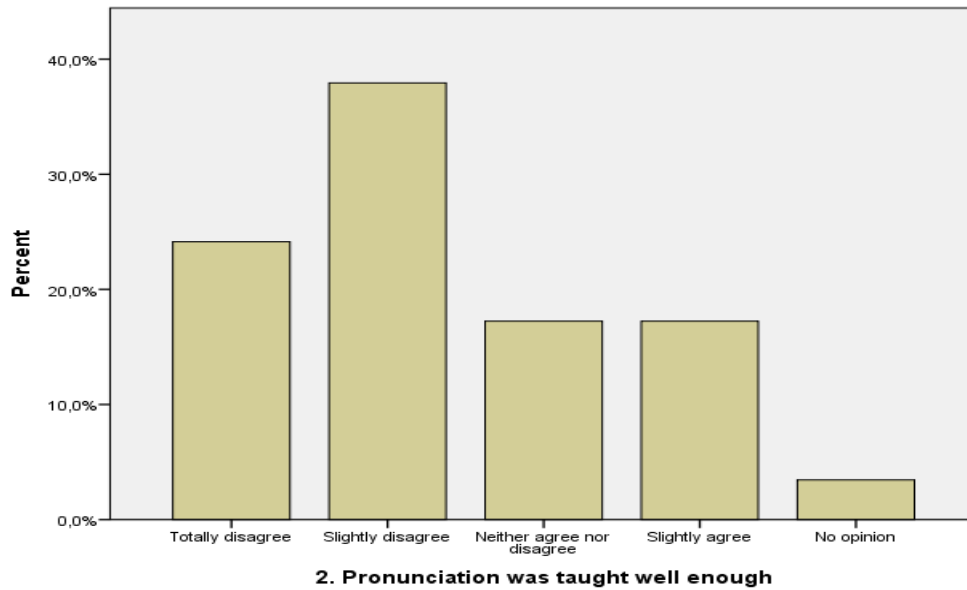


Figure 1: Statement 2

Regarding the statement 'Pronunciation was taught well enough', the majority of the respondents thought that overall pronunciation was not taught well enough in their upper secondary schools: 24.1% disagreed completely and 37.9% slightly (Figure 1). This finding implies that, according to students, pronunciation could have been taught better in upper secondary schools.

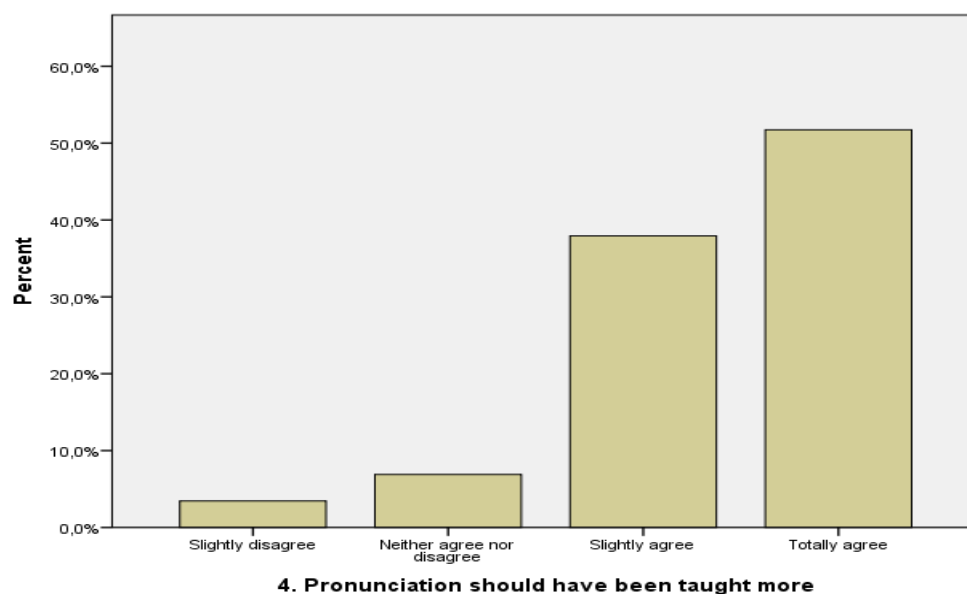


Figure 2: Statement 4

Similar tendency is seen in the results of Statement 4 (Figure 2) concerning the desired amount of pronunciation teaching: altogether 89.6% either slightly or completely agreed. Therefore, a significant majority would want pronunciation to be taught more. In addition, Statement 1 'The amount of pronunciation teaching was sufficient' (see Appendix 3), which functioned as a counter-statement for Statement 4, provided similar results: roughly 70% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Thus the students seem to feel that the pronunciation teaching they had received in upper secondary school was not sufficient in both quantity and quality.

Answers to open questions also supported this opinion, as can be seen in the following extracts (Examples 1 and 2). Each example has the student's identification code in parentheses, such as S16.

Example 1. Puheen tuottaminen ja ääntämys jäivät paljolti muun opittavan (luetunymmärrys, kielioppi) jalkoihin. Meillä oli kyllä keskusteluharjoituksia, mutta ne olivat hyvin rajattuja (S16).

Speech production and pronunciation were mostly hindered by other learning objectives (reading comprehension, grammar). We did have conversation tasks, but they were very restricted.

Example 2. Ajatus kuitenkin oli, että ääntäminen on opeteltu jo yläasteella, eikä siihen tarvitse panostaa enää lukiossa (S4).

The idea was, however, that pronunciation had been taught already in lower secondary school, and no effort had to be made for that in upper secondary school.

Almost all of the respondents, 93.1%, agreed that there should be more oral courses in upper secondary school (see Figure 3). This is a very clear indication that, according to former students, oral courses are certainly demanded and needed in upper secondary school.

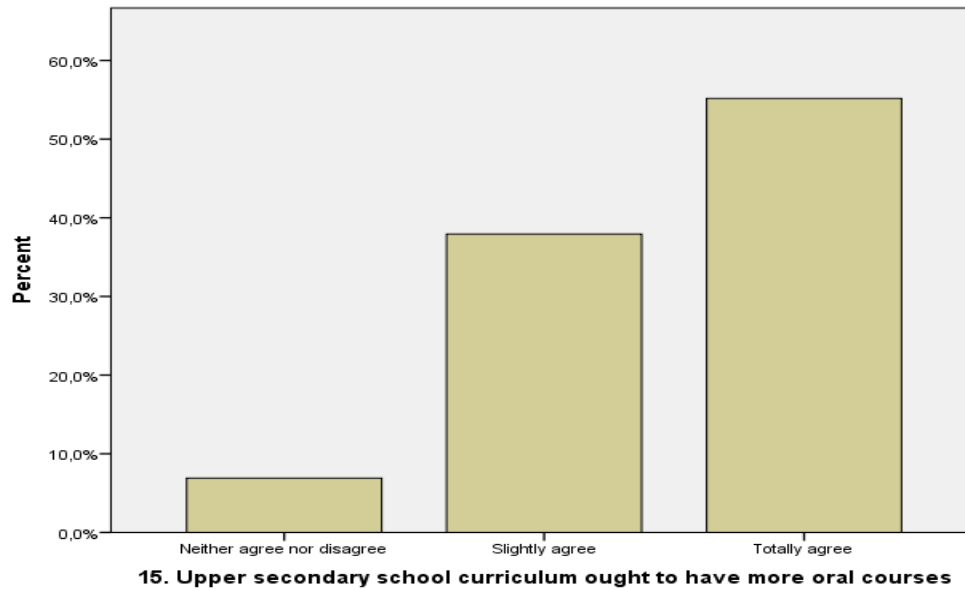


Figure 3: Statement 15

In the open questions students expressed their will to have more oral courses or alternatively one obligatory oral course which was pointed out by two students. Example 3 demonstrates this latter suggestion:

Example 3. Yksi vapaavalintainen ääntämiskurssi oli lukiossa, ehkä 10% opiskelijoista valitsi sen. Ainakin tämä yksi kurssi tulisi olla pakollinen (S10).

There was one optional pronunciation course in upper secondary school, maybe 10% of the students chose it. At least this course should be obligatory.

Figure 4 shows that the students either slightly or totally agreed (altogether 82.7%) on wanting to have an oral part in the matriculation exam. This result shows significant support for the plans of testing oral proficiency at the end of upper secondary school, which would also increase the appreciation of pronunciation.

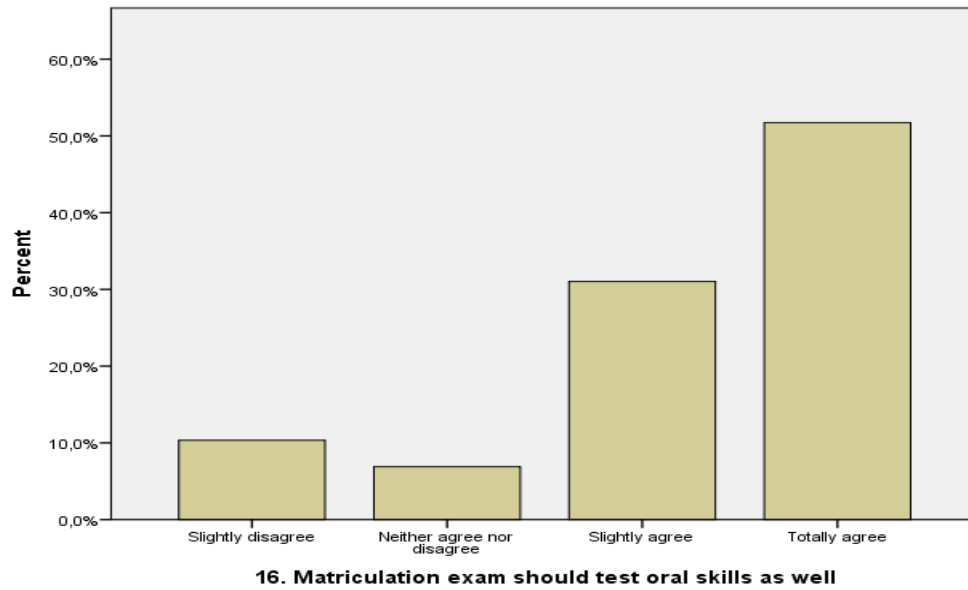


Figure 4: Statement 16

5.2 Teachers' pronunciation

The theme of the second research question, teachers' pronunciation and its effect on the students' learning of pronunciation, consists of three statements which were chosen for analysis.

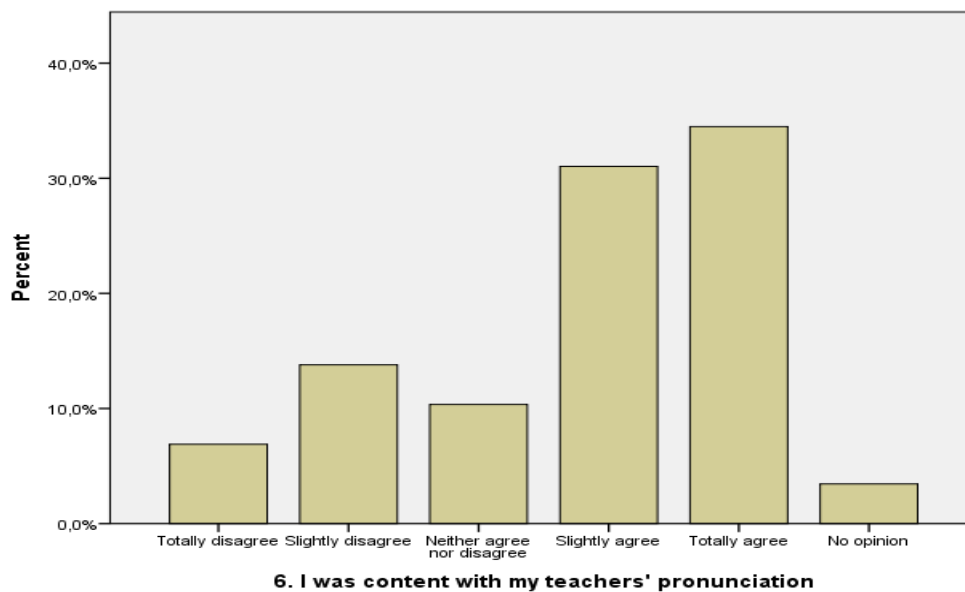


Figure 5: Statement 6

It can be observed in Figure 5 that almost two thirds of the respondents (65.5%) answered positively and thus were satisfied with their teachers' pronunciation. Altogether 20.7% disagreed and 10.3% were indecisive.

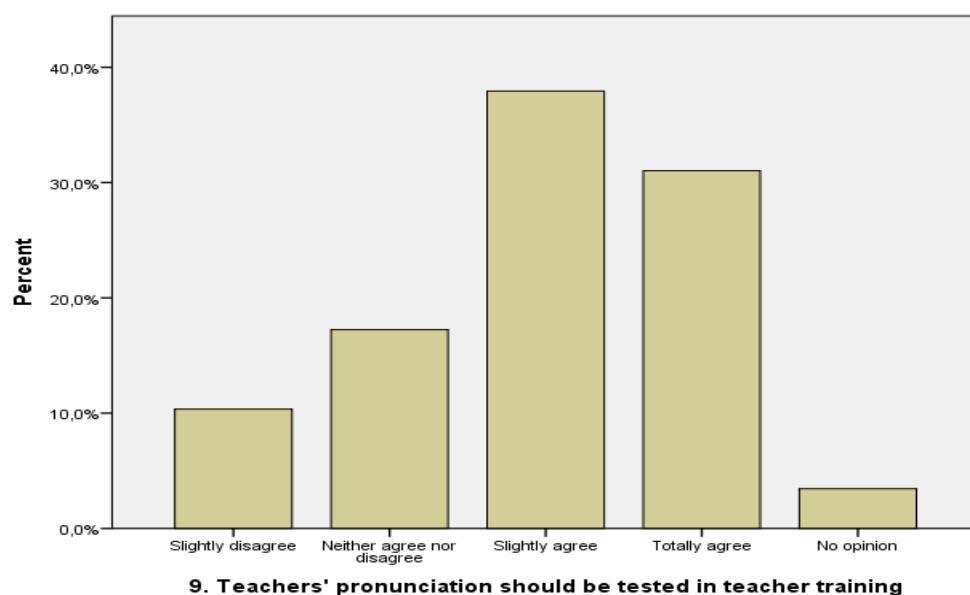


Figure 6: Statement 9

Roughly two thirds of the students (68.9%) agreed that pronunciation ought to be tested in teacher training (Figure 6). These views were also elaborated in the final open question. In the following extract (Example 4) a suggestion is proposed for the interview in the language teachers' entrance exam:

Example 4. Mielestäni kielten opettajankoulutus-haastattelu tulisi tapahtua sillä kyseisellä vieraalla kielellä. On hämmentävää, miten vieraan kielen opettajaksi voi valmistua todella kehnolla suullisella kielitaidolla (S23).

I think the language teacher interview should be conducted in the foreign language in question. It's confusing how foreign language teachers can graduate with very poor language skills.

As can be seen in Figure 7, around half of the students (51.7%) did not have their teachers as pronunciation models (34.5% totally disagreed and 17.2% slightly disagreed with Statement 11). Thus, for them, the pronunciation model(s) came from somewhere else. Sources of pronunciation models that were mentioned by the respondents were listening comprehension

tasks, classmates and interests outside of school.

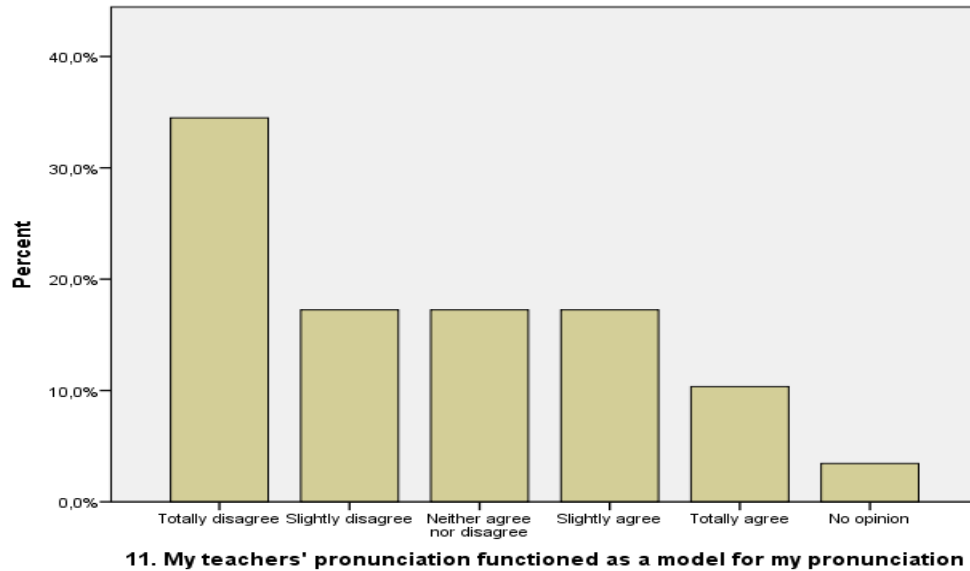


Figure 7: Statement 11

However, for over one fourth of the students (27.5%) their teachers' pronunciation provided a model, which implies that teachers' pronunciation can be an important factor in students' pronunciation learning. This kind of influence is presented in Example 5:

Example 5. Toistettiin sanoja ja joskus opettaja korjasi jos sanoi väärin, opeteltiin tiettyjä äänteitä ja aksentteja. Opin ääntämään kuten opettajan puhe minulle kuulosti (S15).
We repeated words and sometimes the teacher corrected if someone pronounced wrong, we learned certain sounds and accents. I learned to pronounce like my teacher's speech sounded to me.

5.3 Learning pronunciation in and outside of class

The third research question was about how pronunciation is learned in and outside of classroom. Three statements were analysed and they are presented in the following figures.

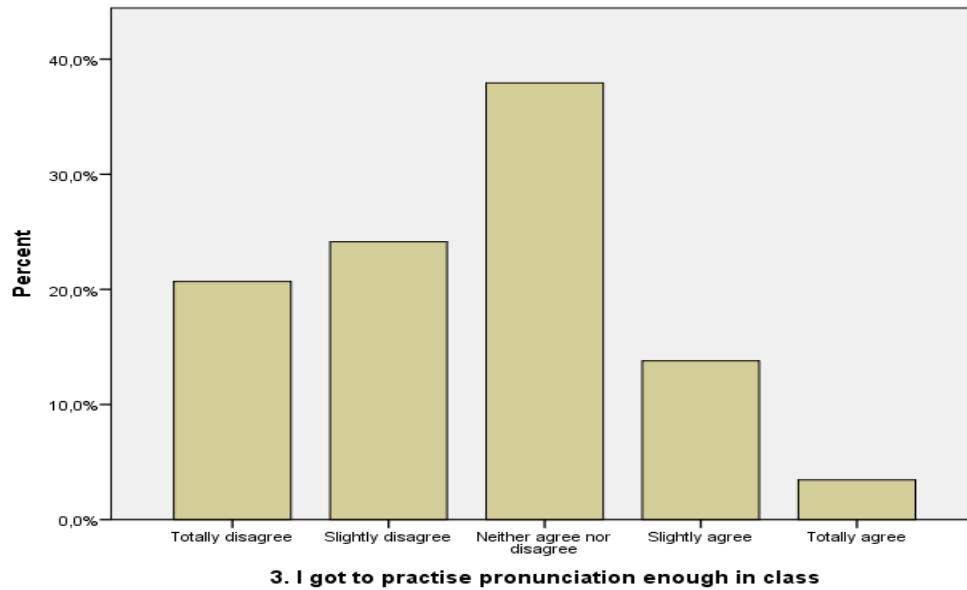


Figure 8: Statement 3

Only four students slightly agreed and one completely agreed with the third statement, in other words expressed that they had had enough opportunities to practise pronunciation in-class (see Figure 8). 44.8% of the respondents either slightly or totally disagreed. The portion of undecided was exceptionally high in this statement, as it was over one third (37.9%). Perhaps this tells about the tendency reported in Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), that there usually is no clear division to pronunciation practice in lessons, for it is often part of other activities, for example grammar or conversation tasks. Therefore, the focus is not solely on pronunciation but on some other skill as well, which can make it more difficult to distinguish the task as pronunciation practice.

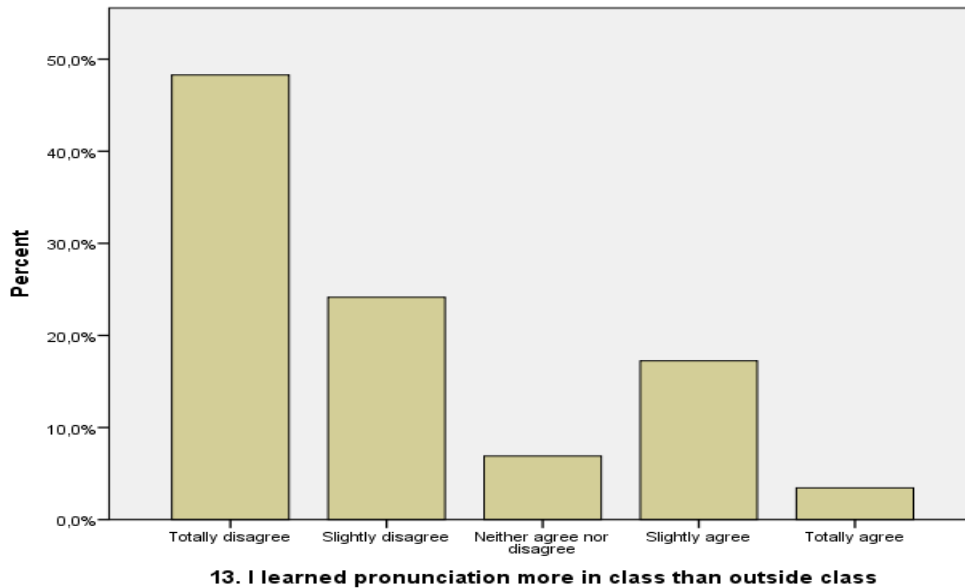


Figure 9: Statement 13

Most of the respondents did not agree with the statement 'I learned pronunciation more in class than outside class' presented in Figure 9: 48.3% disagreed completely and 24.1% slightly. Thus over two thirds of them felt that they had learned pronunciation more in other contexts than at school. About one fifth (20.6%) of students had learned pronunciation more in class. This finding implies that English pronunciation is most often learned somewhere else than in English lessons, which was also expressed in several open question answers.

Examples 6 and 7 below illustrate this phenomenon:

Example 6. Oman ääntämiseni olen oppinut täysin koulun ulkopuolella, mielestäni erittäin hyvin. Omalla innostuksella on toki merkitystä paljon (S17).

I have learned my pronunciation completely outside of school, in my opinion very well. One's own enthusiasm sure has a great influence.

Example 7. Olisin toivonut lukiossa enemmän opetusta ääntämisessä, mutta koin, että sanastojen foneettinen kirjoitus ja kappaleiden äänitetyt versiot auttoivat. Koen oppineeni eniten ääntämisestä keskustellessani englanninkielisten ystäväni kanssa, kun pyysin heitä korjaamaan minua tarvittaessa (S28).

I would have wished to have more pronunciation teaching in upper secondary school, but I felt that phonetic script in vocabularies and textbook chapter recordings were of help. I feel I have learned the most about pronunciation while discussing with my English-speaking friends, when I asked them to correct me when needed.

As Figure 10 shows, a little less than half of the students (44.8%) totally or slightly disagreed and thus may have not been instructed to practise pronunciation outside classes. This result is

rather worrisome, as students felt that pronunciation practice in class was insufficient (see Figure 8) and neither were they advised to practise it independently in their free time.

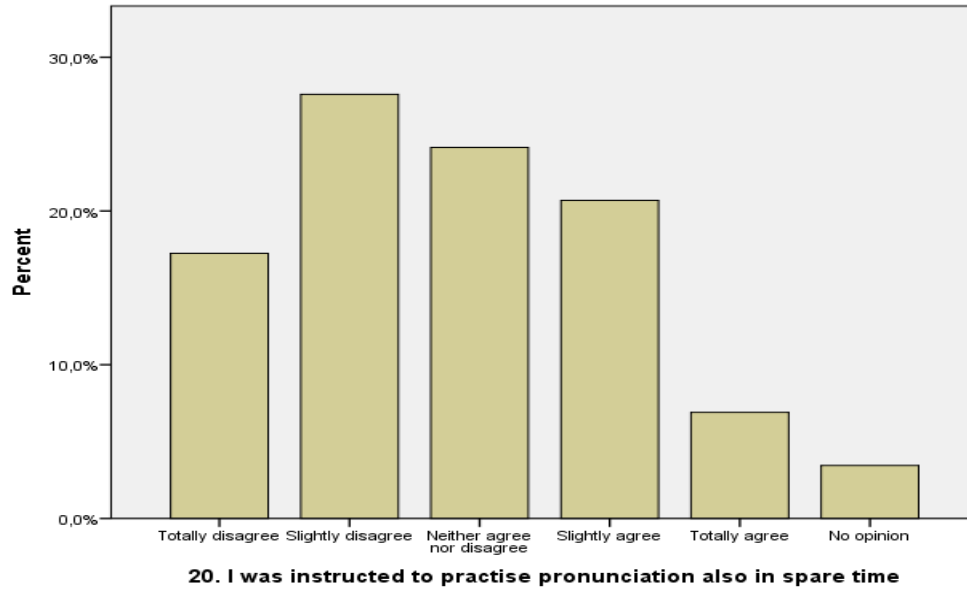


Figure 10: Statement 20

From these findings we can conclude that pronunciation learning is somewhat independent in Finnish upper secondary schools, and it is the students' responsibility to learn pronunciation. This is supported by the answers to Statement 21 (see Appendix 3): a significant majority, 86.2% of respondents expressed that they were responsible for their pronunciation learning.

5.4 Perceptions on using phonemic script

The last research question concerned the usage of phonemic script in the students' upper secondary schools. Two statements of this theme will be presented below.

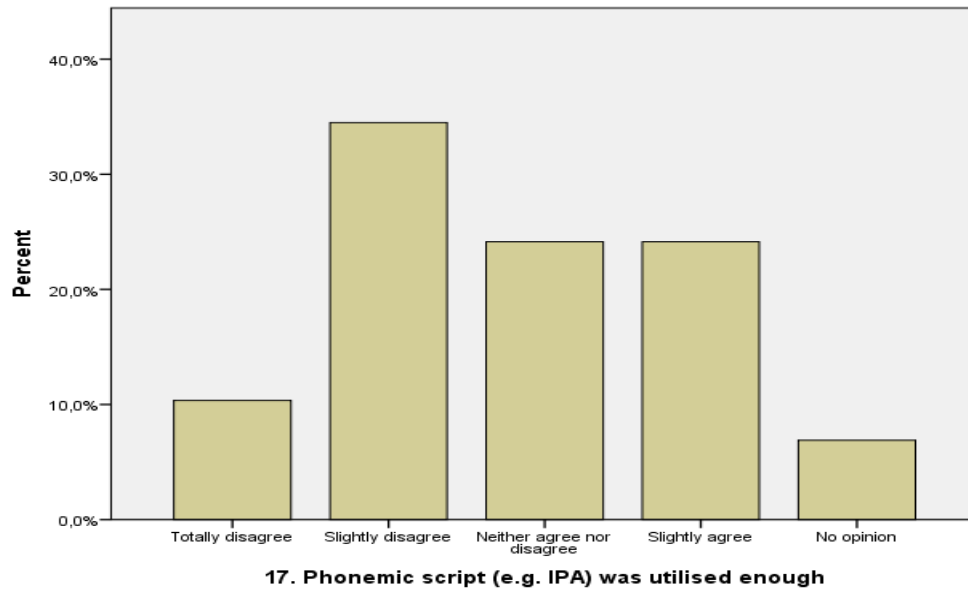


Figure 11: Statement 17

10.3% of the respondents totally disagreed and 34.5% slightly disagreed with the statement 'Phonemic script (e.g. IPA) was utilised enough' presented in Figure 11. Besides, no one agreed completely, 24.1% slightly agreed and the same portion was indecisive. Thus the majority did not feel that phonemic script had been utilised sufficiently in pronunciation teaching. This result reflects Tergujeff's (2012) findings of phonemic script being rarely used or referred to during English lessons. Yet it is controversial to the fact that phonemic scripts can be easily found in Finnish EFL textbooks (Tergujeff 2010, cited in Tergujeff 2012: 604).

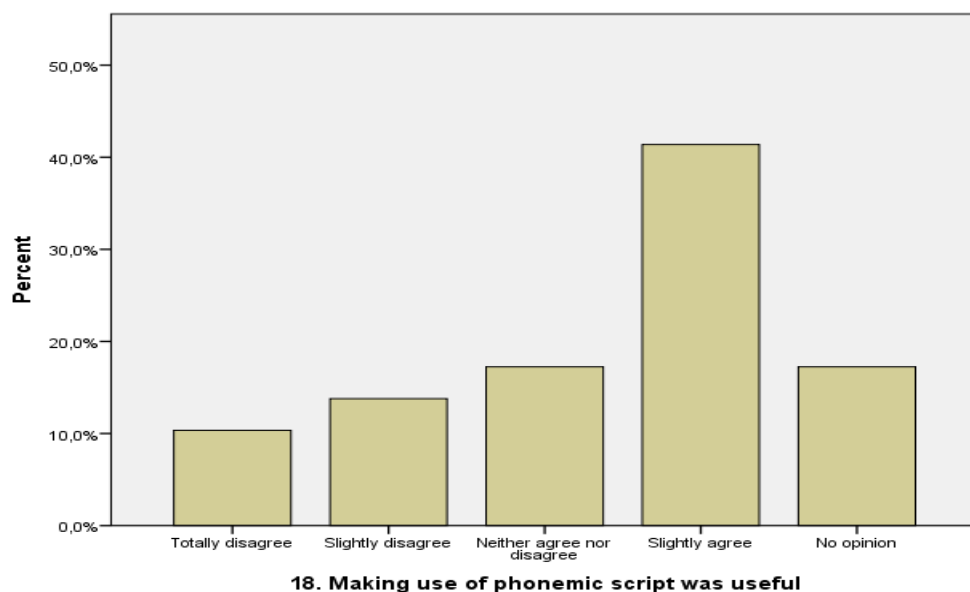


Figure 12: Statement 18

As can be seen in Figure 12, the students were somewhat unsure of the usefulness of the phonemic script. No student agreed completely, but a little over two fifths of them (41.4%) slightly agreed that it was useful to use phonemic script. The fact that the highest portion of the answers were in the 'slightly agree' category reflects the results of Lintunen's (2004) study. However, the uncertainty of the answers might tell about the students' unclear conceptions on phonemic script, or personal reasons and penchants as Tergujeff suggested (2013: 88). On the other hand, probably some of the students did not learn phonemic script at school at all, and these students have chosen either 'no opinion' or 'neither agree nor disagree' in this statement. Most of the respondents, nevertheless, thought that phonemic script should have been utilised better (for Statement 19, see Appendix 3).

5.5 Pronunciation teaching: experiences and suggestions

Two of the open-ended questions functioned as follow-ups of the Likert-scale statements. In the first open question students were asked to evaluate their teachers' pronunciation teaching practices and their effect on their learning of pronunciation. The most often mentioned practices were reading aloud and repeating after the teacher or a recording. Conversations were mentioned by three respondents, correction by three and usage of IPA by one student. These learning practices are represented in the following extracts:

Example 8. Ääntämistä harjoiteltiin pääasiassa lukemalla kirjan kappaleita ja tekemällä keskusteluharjoituksia. Ääntämiseen itsessään ei siis kiinnitetty erityistä huomiota, vaan sitä harjoiteltiin näissä muodoissa (S28).

Pronunciation was mainly practised by reading book chapters [aloud] and by doing conversation tasks. Particular attention to pronunciation itself was not paid but it was practised in these ways.

Example 9. Yleensä suoraan oppikirjan mukaan menttiin, mikä oli usein mekaanista ja tylsää. Hyvin vähän autenttisia tilanteita päästiin harjoittelemaan (S18).

Usually we followed the textbook directly which was often mechanical and boring. We got to practise very few authentic situations.

Example 10. Enimmäkseen he korjailivat väärää ääntämistä kuin opettivat oikeaa (S6).

They were mostly correcting wrong pronunciation rather than teaching the right one.

In the second open question respondents were asked to share their opinions of what oral courses and matriculation exam's oral part should focus on. Own production, conversation skills and mastering the pronunciation of single words and phrases were given as examples. From these alternatives students emphasised conversation skills and own production the most. Pronunciation mastering was noted by seven students, but they often added that it should not be the main point of focus. Three students stated directly that all the mentioned areas are important. Other aspects that were brought up were free speaking, intelligibility, self-expression and courage or confidence to speak (see Examples 11-13).

Example 11. Oma tuottaminen ja keskustelutaidot ovat ehdottomasti tärkeimpiä, mutta mahdollisessa arvostelussa tulisi myös ottaa huomioon ääntäminen (S29).

Own production and conversational skills are definitely the most important, but pronunciation should be taken into account in the possible evaluation.

Example 12. Äänteiden läpikäyminen [...] olisi ehdottomasti hyödyllistä, mutta sen ei tulisi olla pääasia. Suullisen osan tulisi keskittyä arjen taitojen, keskustelun, parantamiseen (S21).

Going through the sounds would definitely be useful, but it should not be the main point. The oral part ought to focus on improving the everyday life skills, conversation.

Example 13. Kursseilla voitaisiin keskittyä myös yksittäisten sanojen/lauseiden (/äänteiden) hallitsemiseen. Kokeen tulisi silti mielestäni keskittyä keskustelutaitoihin ja ymmärrettävyyteen (S19).

In courses the foci could be on mastering single words/phrases (/sounds). Yet the exam should, in my opinion, focus on conversational skills and intelligibility.

The last open-ended question was free-form: students had an opportunity to tell what they wanted about their experiences and/or opinions relating to pronunciation learning and teaching. Overall the respondents valued pronunciation teaching, but they did not insist on 'perfect' or 'correct' pronunciation:

Example 14. Ääntämisen ei tarvitse missään nimessä olla täydellistä; aksentit voi ja pitääkin kuulua, mutta ääntämisessä pitää pyrkiä ymmärrettävyyteen ja sujuvuuteen (S1).

By no means pronunciation needs to be perfect; accents can and should be distinguished, but one should aim at intelligibility and fluency in pronunciation.

Example 15. Pidän ääntämisen opettamista hyvin tärkeänä, koska ilman riittävän hyvää ääntämystä viesti ei mene perille, vaikka se olisi kieliopillisesti oikein (S7).

I think teaching pronunciation is very important, because without good enough pronunciation the message does not get across, even if it was grammatically correct.

Example 16. 'Oikeaa' ääntämistä ei tulisi niinkään painottaa yläkoulussa/lukiossa, oppilaiden joukossa on muutenkin epävarmuutta kielen käyttämisestä (S25).

'Correct' pronunciation should not be emphasised that much in lower/upper secondary school, there is already uncertainty about language usage among pupils.

Students were also lacking confidence relating to their own pronunciation, which reflects the opinion that pronunciation teaching in upper secondary schools could be improved. Several respondents reported on noticing their poor level of English pronunciation when beginning their university studies:

Example 17. Huomasin lukion jälkeen, etten osannut monien perussanojenkaan oikeita ääntämistapoja. Myös äänteissä oli puutteita (S24).

I noticed after upper secondary school that I didn't even know the right pronunciation of basic words. Individual sounds were also lacking.

Example 18. Kun olen ollut täällä ääntämiskurssilla, olen tajunnut että olen ääntänyt jotkut sanat aivan liian "laiskasti" koska minulla ei ole ollut hajuakaan, miten suun pitäisi olla, olen vain matkinut ääniä aiemmin (S15).

When I've been on a pronunciation course here, I've realised that I've pronounced some words far too "lazily" because I had no clue how my mouth should be, I've just imitated sounds before.

These notions correspond well with the results of Lintunen's (2004) study of the pronunciation of Finnish university students of English: their pronunciation had major flaws as well, even though they represent the best students of English in the Finnish school system.

In conclusion, the respondents had had very conventional pronunciation teaching practices: mainly reading aloud and mechanical production with few conversational tasks. Besides, some of the students reported that these practices had no or little effect on their pronunciation learning. On the contrary, they would like to see oral courses and matriculation exam's oral part focus more on student-initiated production and conversation. Flawless pronunciation was not insisted so much as intelligible communication and building learners' confidence to speak in English. Some of the respondents wanted to point out their deficiency

in pronunciation, which indicates that more and better pronunciation teaching is needed in Finnish upper secondary schools.

6 CONCLUSION

In the present paper I aimed at exploring how students studying English at a Finnish university perceive English pronunciation teaching in their former upper secondary schools. The research questions concerned the overall evaluation of received pronunciation teaching, teachers' pronunciation and teaching practices, the roles of in and out-of-class learning of pronunciation and opinions of using phonemic script. I also wanted to find out how students feel about having an additional oral course in upper secondary schools and including assessment of oral skills in the matriculation examination.

The common opinion among the students was that pronunciation teaching in their upper secondary school had been insufficient both in quality and quantity, and they would have wanted to be taught pronunciation more extensively and profoundly. Thus it did not come as a surprise that a clear majority of the respondents regarded additional oral courses and inclusion of an oral part in the matriculation exam positively. The practices used during English courses were reported to be traditional, mechanical and teacher-led. All in all, the students would like to see a more communicative and learner-centred approach with emphasis on intelligibility and a balance between knowing how to produce the sounds and how to use them in real-life situations. Testing teachers' oral skills in teacher training was perceived as important in order to have competent teachers. Overall the respondents were contented with their teachers' pronunciation, though for most of them it did not serve as a model for their own pronunciation. This implied that pronunciation models are taken from somewhere else than the classroom, but future research would be needed to examine more thoroughly where exactly these models come from.

In line with the previous finding, most of the pronunciation learning was found to take place outside of class. This might be explained by the strong presence of English in the Finnish society, for example on media and youth culture. However, since students had not been given enough opportunities to practise pronunciation at school nor had they been instructed to do so in spare time, it can be questioned whether the lack of pronunciation teaching at schools in fact forces students to learn it in other contexts. Hence, teachers should pay more attention to strengthening the ties between learning pronunciation in and out of

class. Phonemic script was neither utilised enough according to the respondents, but among them there also appeared to be distinct dividedness and uncertainty of its usefulness. It can also be asked in which way, if at all, phonemic script has been taught and utilised when opinions of it are unclear to this extent, as research findings have proven phonemic transcription to be helpful for learning pronunciation (see e.g. Lintunen 2004).

These results can be used as implications for upper secondary school curricula and teacher training as well as language teachers themselves. An oral part should be added to the matriculation exam and, in consequence, there ought to be more oral courses available for students or more inclusion of oral skills in current courses. Pronunciation should be emphasised also in teacher training so that teachers can provide a consistent model of pronunciation and teach it effectively. Teachers are to teach pronunciation more and better, preferably in more engaging and communicative ways, and build bridges between in and out-of-class learning. Using phonemic script might also be a welcome and effective method of learning pronunciation that teachers could familiarise themselves with.

As pronunciation, despite being an important part of oral proficiency and language skills in general, seems to be widely neglected in both teaching and research, its status should be improved. The data for this study might be too narrow to have generalisable results, so future research ought to be done with a larger group of respondents. For instance, motivation plays a major part in pronunciation learning and some of the statements of my questionnaire dealt with this topic, but they were left out from the analysis because of the limitations of this study. An extensive study of oral proficiency on the whole would also be necessary in order to take more of its factors and aspects into account.

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8 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Arvoisa vastaaja,

Teen tutkimusta kandidaatin tutkielmaani varten Jyväskylän yliopiston englannin oppiaineen opettaja-linjalla. Kysely koskee yliopisto-opiskelijoiden, entisten lukiolaisten, mielipiteitä lukion englannin ääntämisen opettamisesta. Pyydän, että keskityt vastauksissasi entisen lukiosi englannin opettajiin ja heidän opetukseensa.

Vastaa alla oleviin väittämiin ympyröimällä mielipidettäsi parhaiten vastaava numero asteikolla 1-5, jossa 1 on ”täysin eri mieltä” ja 5 ”täysin samaa mieltä”. Jos sinulla ei ole mielipidettä asiaan, merkkää rasti kohtaan ”en osaa sanoa”. Avoimessa kysymyksessä kirjoita vastaus sille varattuun tilaan. Aikaa vastaamiseen on 10 minuuttia.

Sukupuoli: nainen/ mies

Ikä:

Pääaine:

Yliopisto-opintojen aloitusvuosi:

Lukion nimi:

Lukion paikkakunta:

| | Täysin eri mieltä | Hieman eri mieltä | Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä | Hieman samaa mieltä | Täysin samaa mieltä | En osaa sanoa |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Ääntämisopetuksen määrä oli riittävä. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Ääntämistä opetettiin tarpeeksi hyvin. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Sain harjoitella ääntämistä tarpeeksi oppitunneilla. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Ääntämistä olisi pitänyt opettaa enemmän. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Saamani ääntämisopetus valmisti onnistuneesti koulun ulkopuolisiin kielenkäyttötilanteisiin. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Olin tyytyväinen opettajieni ääntämiseen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Opettajieni ääntäminen oli lähellä natiivipuhujaa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Opettajieni ääntämisen olisi pitänyt olla parempi. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Opettajien ääntämistä tulisi testata opettajankoulutuksessa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Opettajieni ääntäminen vaikutti uskottavuuteen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Opettajieni ääntäminen toimi mallina omalle ääntämiselleni. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Opettajieni ääntäminen vaikutti opiskelumotivaatiooni. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Opin ääntämistä enemmän oppitunneilla kuin koulun ulkopuolella. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Opettajat kannustivat harjoittelemaan ääntämistä. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Käännä →

| | Täysin eri mieltä | Hieman eri mieltä | Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä | Hieman samaa mieltä | Täysin samaa mieltä | En osaa sanoa |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 15. Lukion opetussuunnitelmiin tulisi lisätä suullisia kursseja. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Ylioppilaskokeessa tulisi testata myös suullista kielitaitoa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Foneettista kirjoitusta (esim. IPA) käytettiin ääntämisopetuksen apuna tarpeeksi. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Foneettisen kirjoituksen käyttö oli hyödyllistä. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Foneettista kirjoitusta olisi pitänyt hyödyntää paremmin. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. Minua ohjeistettiin harjoittelemaan ääntämistä myös vapaa-ajalla. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Ääntämisen oppiminen oli omalla vastuullani. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Ääntämisen oppimisessani vaikuttivat enemmän koulun ulkopuoliset tekijät, kuten media. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. Motivaatio ääntämisen oppimiseeni tuli enemmän koulun sisältä kuin sen ulkopuolelta. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

24. Arvioi vielä opettajiesi **ääntämisen opetustapoja** ja niiden vaikutusta oppimiseesi.

25. Mihin lukion suullisten kurssien ja mahdollisen ylioppilaskokeen suullisen osan tulisi mielestäsi keskittyä? (esim. oma tuottaminen, keskustelutaidot, yksittäisten sanojen ja lauseiden ääntämisen hallitseminen)

26. Voit vielä kertoa vapaasti kokemuksistasi tai mielipiteistäsi aiheeseen liittyen.

Appendix 2: English version of the questionnaire

Dear respondent,

I'm conducting a study for my Bachelor's Thesis for English language teaching in University of Jyväskylä. This questionnaire is about university students' opinions about English pronunciation teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools. I ask you to focus on your former upper secondary school's teachers and their teaching.

Please answer the statements below by circling the number that best corresponds to your opinion. Scale is from 1 to 5, 1 meaning "totally disagree" and 5 meaning "totally agree". If you don't have an opinion, tick the box under "No opinion". In open questions, please write your answer on the lines below them. You have 10 minutes to answer to the questionnaire.

Sex: female/ male

Age:

Major subject:

Starting year of studies:

Upper secondary school's name:

City:

| | Totally disagree | Slightly disagree | Do not agree nor disagree | Slightly agree | Totally agree | No opinion |
|--|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The amount of pronunciation teaching was sufficient. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Pronunciation was taught well enough. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I got to practise pronunciation enough in-class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Pronunciation should have been taught more. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Pronunciation teaching I received successfully prepared me for real-life communication. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I was content with my teachers' pronunciation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. My teachers' pronunciation was native-like. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. My teachers' pronunciation should have been better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Teachers' pronunciation should be tested in teacher training. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. My teachers' pronunciation affected their credibility. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. My teachers' pronunciation functioned as a model for my pronunciation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. My learning motivation was affected by my teacher's pronunciation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I learned pronunciation more in-class than outside class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. My teachers encouraged to practise pronunciation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Turn →

| | Totally disagree | Slightly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Slightly agree | Totally agree | No opinion |
|---|------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 15. Upper secondary school curriculum ought to have more oral courses. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Matriculation exam should test oral skills as well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Phonemic script (e.g. IPA) was utilised enough. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Making use of phonemic script was useful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Phonemic script should have been utilised better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. I was instructed to practise pronunciation also in spare time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Learning pronunciation was on my responsibility. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Factors outside school, e.g. media, affected my pronunciation learning the most. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. My motivation to learn pronunciation came more from school than from outside of it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

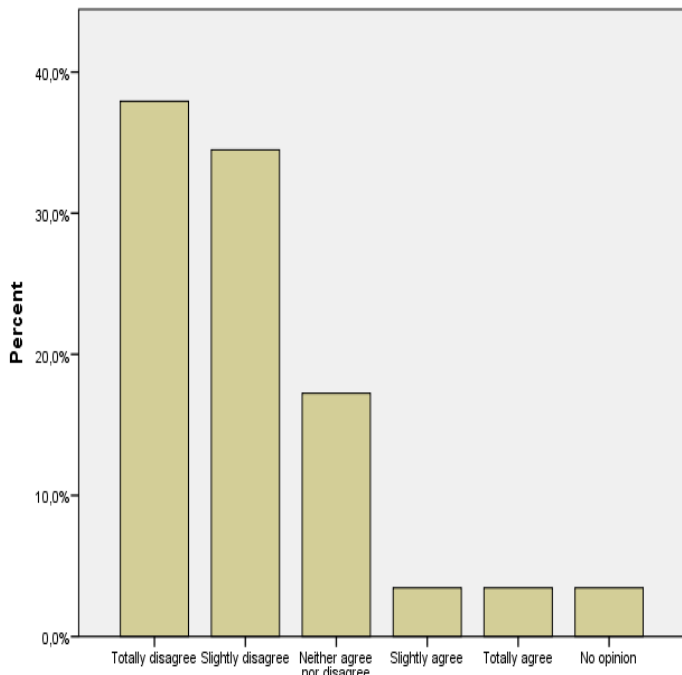
24. Please evaluate your teacher's **pronunciation teaching practices** and their effect on your learning.

25. What should oral courses and the possible oral part of the matriculation exam focus on? (For example own production, conversation skills, mastering the pronunciation of individual words and phrases)

26. You can tell freely about your experience or opinions relating to the topic.

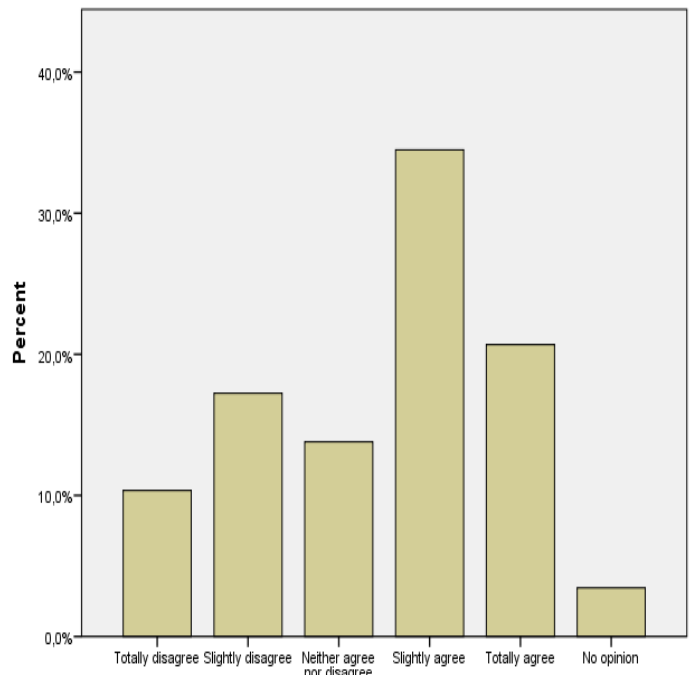
Thank you for your answers! :)

Appendix 3: The figures



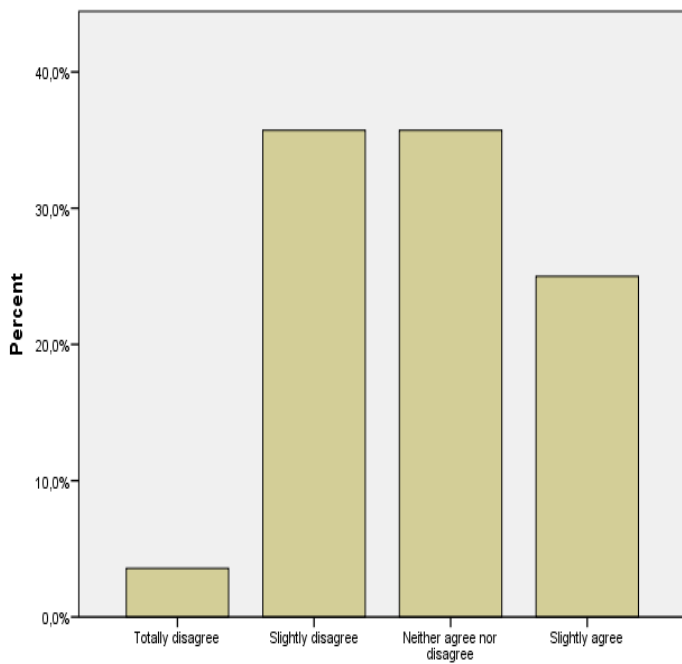
1. The amount of pronunciation teaching was sufficient

Figure 13: Statement 1



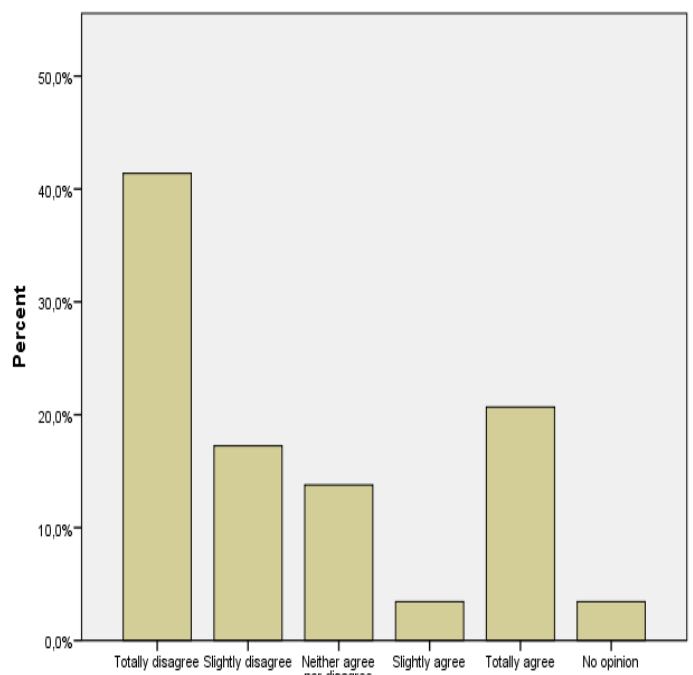
7. My teachers' pronunciation was native-like

Figure 15: Statement 7



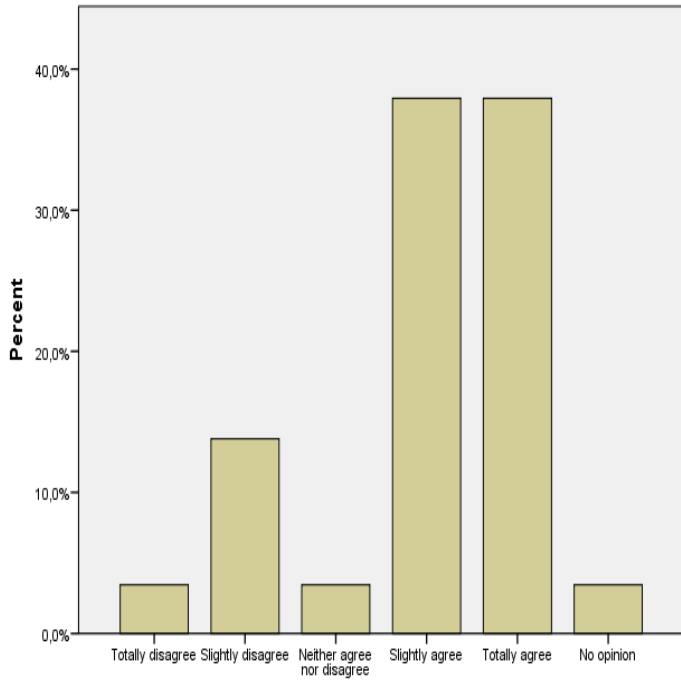
5. Pronunciation teaching I received successfully prepared me for real-life communication

Figure 14: Statement 5



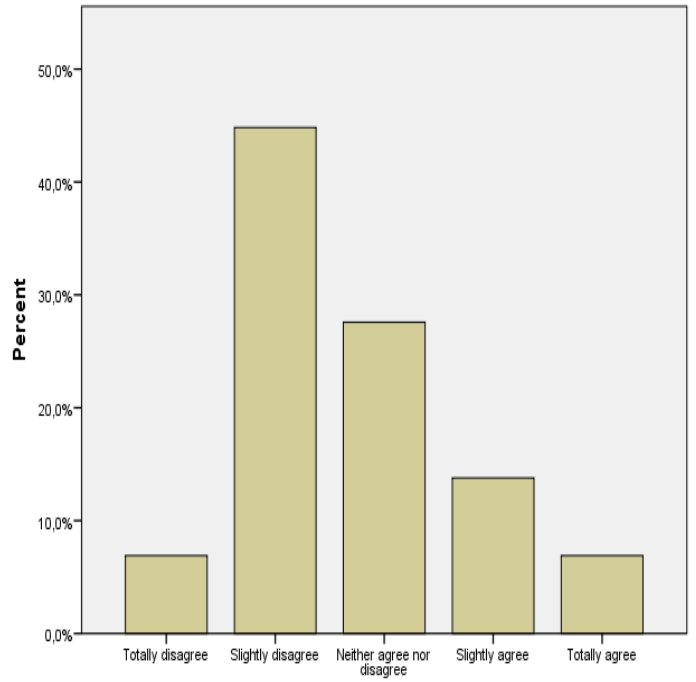
8. My teachers' pronunciation should have been better

Figure 16: Statement 8



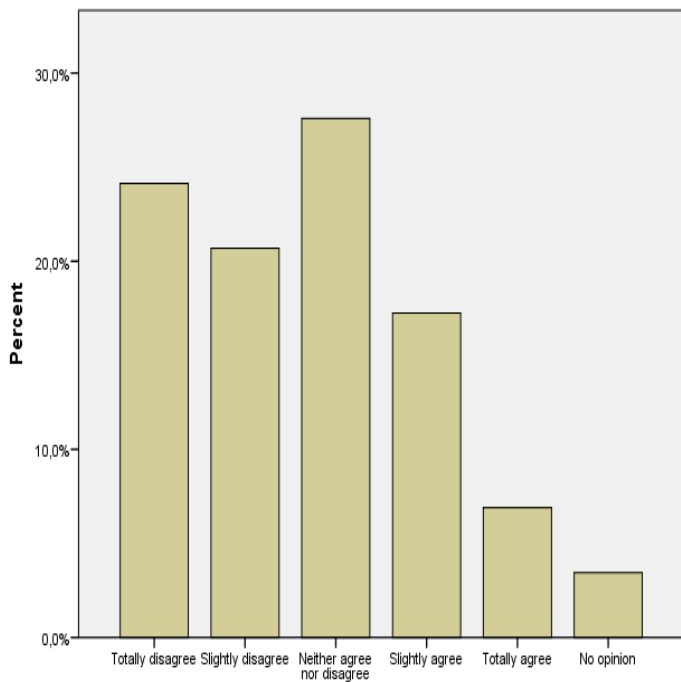
10. My teachers' pronunciation affected their credibility

Figure 17: Statement 10



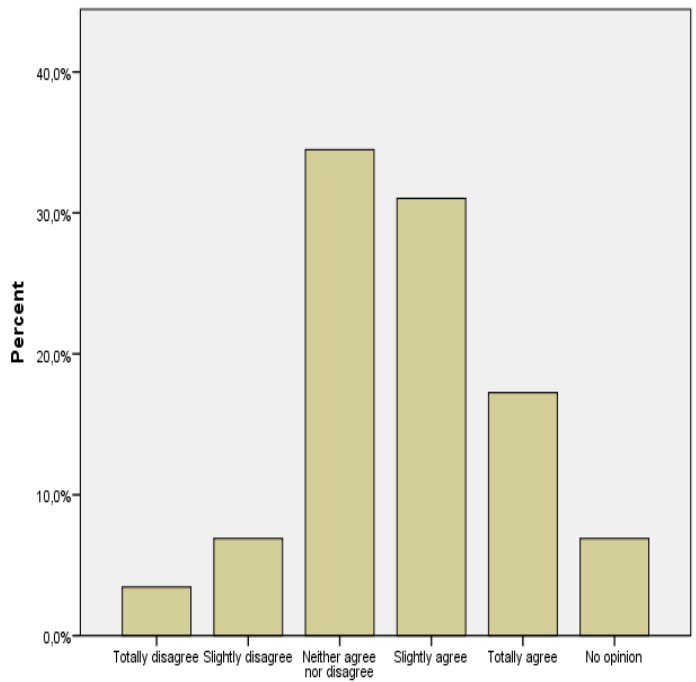
14. My teachers encouraged to practise pronunciation

Figure 19: Statement 14



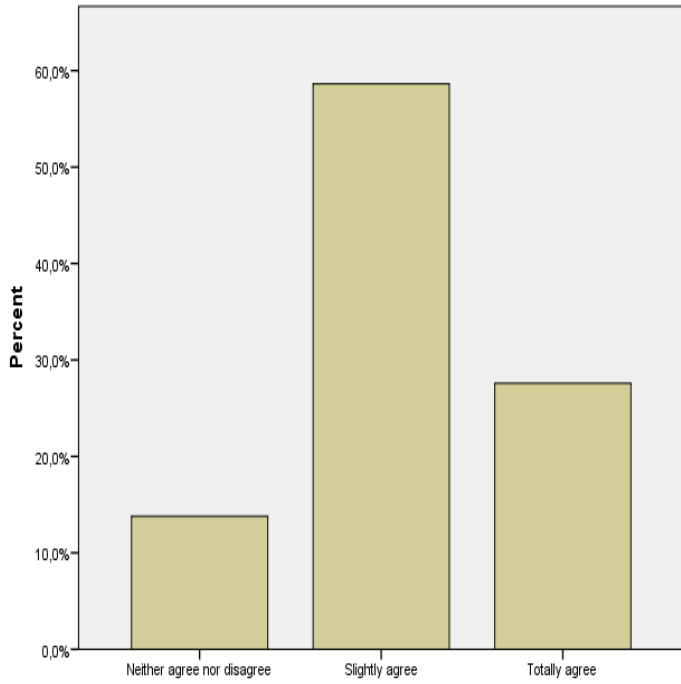
12. My learning motivation was affected by my teachers' pronunciation

Figure 18: Statement 12



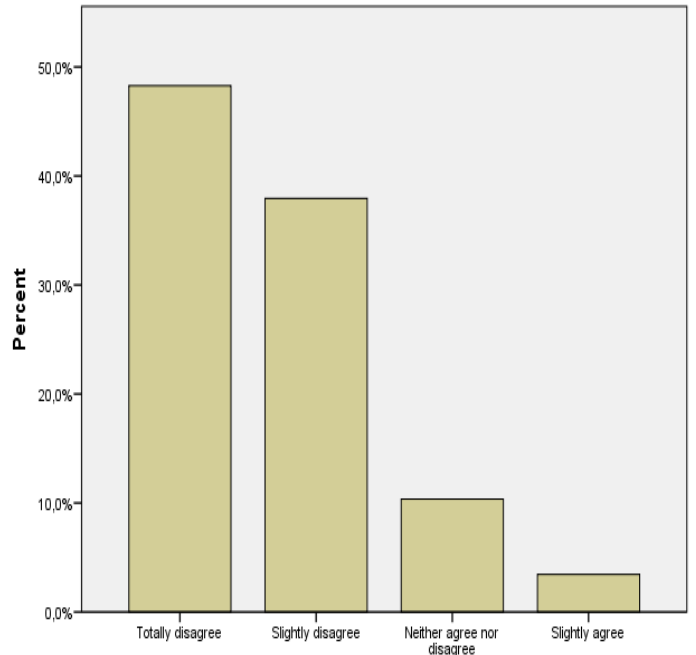
19. Phonemic script should have been utilised better

Figure 20: Statement 19



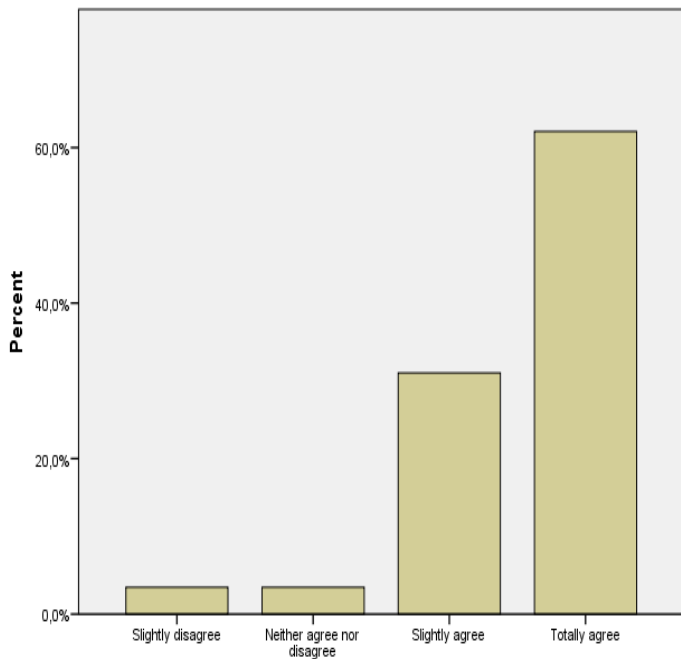
21. Learning pronunciation was on my responsibility

Figure 21: Statement 21



23. My motivation to learn pronunciation came more from school than from outside of it

Figure 23: Statement 23



22. Factors outside school, e.g. media, affected my pronunciation learning the most

Figure 22: Statement 22