



UTMACH

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES

**CARRERA DE PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS NACIONALES Y
EXTRANJEROS**

Fonema consonántico sordo y fonema consonántico sonoro "th".

**CASTRO AMBULUDÍ YULIANA MICAELA
LICENCIADA EN PEDAGOGIA DEL IDIOMA INGLES**

**AGILA FEIJOO STEVEN OSWALDO
LICENCIADO EN PEDAGOGIA DEL IDIOMA INGLES**

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**SISTEMATIZACIÓN DE EXPERIENCIAS PRÁCTICAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y/O
INTERVENCIÓN**

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ZALDUA MORAN EDDY MARSHEL

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2023**

DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE VOICED AND UNVOICED CONSONANTAL PHONEME “TH”

por STEVEN OSWALDO AGILA FEIJOO

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Dedication

To our parents,
our degree tutor,
and to our career coordinator for his guidance.

Steven Oswaldo Agila & Yuliana Micaela Castro

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Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación tuvo como objetivo elaborar una estrategia didáctica mediante el uso de “*minimal pairs*” como método para la diferenciación del fonema consonántico sordo y sonoro “*th*”. Se desarrolló desde una perspectiva metodológica de carácter cuantitativo, con un diseño experimental en una población compuesta por un grupo de 36 estudiantes del décimo grado, paralelo “A” del colegio de Bachillerato “9 de Octubre”. Durante la investigación se consideró el uso de métodos de nivel teórico como el método histórico-lógico, analítico-sintético, e hipotético-deductivo; así mismo, se aplicaron métodos de nivel empírico tales como el método experimental y de observación. Además, se utilizaron a las pruebas pedagógicas y rúbricas de evaluación como instrumentos de la investigación. Previamente se hizo el planteamiento de una hipótesis, en donde posterior a la aplicación de la propuesta de intervención, se logró verificar y obtener resultados significativos que superaban a los iniciales en todos sus indicadores de evaluación. Finalmente, se llegó a la conclusión de que es importante hacer conciencia fonológica a la hora de aprender un nuevo idioma y la importancia de practicar la sub-habilidad de la pronunciación, así mismo, de que las estrategias didácticas dentro de los espacios educativos son fundamentales para crear ambientes interactivos y dinámicos que faciliten la comprensión de los aprendices.

Palabras claves: estrategia didáctica, diferenciación fonema consonántico “*th*”, *minimal pairs*, pronunciación, conciencia fonológica.

Abstract

The objective of this research work was to elaborate a didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs" as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th". It was developed from a quantitative methodological perspective, with an experimental design in a population composed of a group of 36 students of the tenth-grade, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre". During the research, the use of theoretical level methods such as the historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, and hypothetical-deductive methods was considered; likewise, empirical level methods such as the experimental and observation methods were applied. In addition, pedagogical tests and evaluation rubrics were used as research instruments. Previously, a hypothesis was formulated, where after the application of the intervention proposal, it was possible to verify and obtain significant results that surpassed the initial ones in all the evaluation indicators. Finally, it was concluded that it is important to make phonological awareness when learning a new language and the importance of practicing the sub-skill of pronunciation, as well as that didactic strategies within educational spaces are essential to create interactive and dynamic environments that facilitate the understanding of learners.

Keywords: teaching strategy, consonant phoneme differentiation "th", minimal pairs, pronunciation, phonological awareness.

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Introduction

Over the years, the teaching of the English language has been replicated around the world, becoming a fundamental pillar that help to establish efficient communicative relationships between countries with different lifestyles. Therefore, Vanessa Peña (2019) in her master's degree in education, mentions that “esta lengua de raíces germánicas se ha posicionado como un idioma de amplio uso en el mundo, pues abarca no solo campos científicos y tecnológicos sino también correspondientes a la educación” (p.23).

At the academic level, the implementation of pedagogical tools and appropriate methodologies adapted to student's context is significant for language teaching. Since the process of learning English takes place mostly within the classroom, it is of utmost importance to model a teaching environment where students feel comfortable and attracted to the language.

Traditionally, teachers focus on the development of the four primary language skills, where those that are considered productive, speaking and writing, are little or poorly practiced because the sub-skills that compose them are not being considered.

In the development of the speaking skill, a sub-skill that should not be omitted is pronunciation, where another essential aspect for its efficient development is phonological comprehension, that is, the oral language structure formed by words and different sounds or phonemes. In this regard, Gómez Herreros (2021) considers that pronunciation in foreign language teaching is a secondary discipline, where phonetic achievements are ignored without relevance in the curriculum

Thus, the recognition and sound differentiation of phonemes is something fundamental when learning a second language, as it allows the student to understand certain words easily and simply during a conversation. For this reason, Gómez Herreros (2021) states that “un mismo

fonema, dependiendo de la posición que ocupe en las combinaciones silábicas, puede ser producido de una forma u otra, sonando diferente” (p.15).

In Ecuador, the different governments over the years have sought to strengthen the English language teaching, however, due to the application of unconventional methodologies and pedagogical strategies that do not fully cover all language skills, have prevented obtaining desired results. Therefore, Negrete Saltos (2021) in his degree thesis states that:

Ecuador is in the last place within the region when referring to the Index of English Proficiency, this is a matter of concern in the educational context, the learning of English as a foreign language in Ecuador seems to have remain static which is reflected in international results. (p. 2)

A didactic strategy must be linked to learning orientation, quoted by Gutiérrez Delgado et al. (2018) who considers it a pedagogical procedure that enhances student learning, carried out by teachers as a resource applied to achieve the desired purposes (p. 3).

In the tenth-grade of the “09 de Octubre” high school, parallel “A”, there are students with little or no knowledge about the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”, where the following limitations are manifested:

- Students make errors in the use of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.
- The teacher lacks the use of appropriate didactic strategies oriented towards the differentiation of phonemes.
- Classroom environment makes it difficult to work on pronunciation.
- Pronunciation is not prioritized or assessed in a contextualized way.

These referred difficulties allowed us to identify the following research question:

How to improve the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school?

The object of study of this research is the teaching-learning process in basic general education.

As probable causes to the research question, the following were raised:

- The teaching environment of the students is boring.
- Lack of a didactic strategy that motivates students to learn.
- Lack of resources applied as a didactic strategy when teaching.
- Students are afraid to speak in English.

The general aim of the research is to elaborate a didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.

Through the general aim, the methods of teaching and learning are determined as action field of the research.

Thus, the following specific aims were established:

- To do theoretical research on the differentiation of the phoneme “th” in the teaching of English.
- To diagnose the current level of students’ pronunciation.
- To establish a didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.

- To assess the results achieved in the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school after the application of a didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method.

For this research it has been proposed the following scientific hypothesis: If a didactic strategy is applied through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method, the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” will be achieved in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.

In this hypothesis the relationship between two variables is studied:

The independent variable: Didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs”.

The dependent variable: Differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.

The research is carried out from a quantitative methodological paradigm with an experimental design.

The population of the research is composed of a group of 21 students of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school. In addition, the use of theoretical and empirical methods is considered.

The theoretical methods used are:

Historical-logical when explaining the background of the object of study to know its evolution or development over time.

Analytical-synthetic when decomposing a whole in its parts and characteristic of the object of study, followed by a synthesis that achieves the integration of the parts previously analyzed.

Hypothetical-deductive at the moment of establishing the hypothesis of the research and the elaboration of conclusions.

The empirical methods used are:

Experimental method when modifying the conditions of the object of study through the manipulation of the variables with the purpose of controlling its effect and determining its variation according to the didactic strategy applied.

Method of observation when witnessing the student's reality in regard to the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th".

Furthermore, pedagogical tests are used as an empirical technique of the research, which allow the control and measurement of the students' progress.

The current research is meaningful due to it focuses on the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th", applying a didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs" as a method that motivates students to learn, as well as to promote a phonological awareness to improve the pronunciation of the words that compose this phoneme.

The practical contribution of this research to the educational community is the didactic strategy that strengthens, in a dynamic way, the students learning based on the use of "minimal pairs" as a method for students differentiate the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th".

This research is structured as follows: it begins with an introduction where it goes from the general to the specific, mentioning the importance of the implementation of strategies that promote learning through effective methods for the differentiation of the "th" phoneme. Then, chapter 1 begins, the theoretical framework consists of three parts, such as: the historical, conceptual and contextual background of the object of study and the action field of research. After this, chapter 2 is developed, the methodological framework details the way in which the research will be carried

out, consequently, the didactic strategy is established through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are elaborated and the bibliography, in which the information to carry out this research was obtained, is specified.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

1. Theoretical inquiry on the differentiation of the “th” phoneme in English language teaching.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the historical background is described the evolution of the teaching-learning methods in the teaching-learning process of the English language. This is followed by the theoretical characteristics of the object of study, the action field, and the research variable. Finally, the contextual background is determined, which demonstrates the teaching-learning process of the English language in Ecuador.

1.1 Historical evolution of the teaching-learning methods and the teaching-learning process of the English language in basic general education.

The teaching-learning process of the English language has been in constant development as well as the learning methods used in this process, which are necessary to obtain positive results in the acquisition of the language by determining a series of didactic procedures that facilitate the study of English.

In the eighteenth century, English was traditionally taught in schools through the study of grammar and rhetoric, as well as through books and by using methods based on grammar translation, where the memorization of grammatical rules was essential (Peña Ledesma, 2019).

By the nineteenth century the direct method is introduced, as an antagonist to the traditional method used in the last century, according to Palenzuela (who quoted Estupiñan Medina, 2021) when using this teaching method "las clases de inglés se imparten en contacto directo con el idioma. Además, los estudiantes solo pueden comunicarse en inglés" (p. 19). Likewise, the

correction of aspects such as pronunciation or writing a new word was significant, as well as the principle of association of new vocabulary through flashcards (Armas Sánchez, 2019).

On the other hand, in the twentieth century, the development of oral skills was sought through audio lingual methods based on the repetition of dialogues in English to promote speeches among students spontaneously and, in this way, promote a good command of the language (Armas Sánchez, 2019).

In the mid-20th century, minimal pairs "was introduced to students to help them distinguish between similar and problematic sounds in the target language through listening practice and guided oral production" (Torres Jiménez & Rojas Castillo, 2020, p. 28).

In this same century, audio-visual methods were also incorporated in the teaching of English, which made the teaching-learning of the language a more dynamic process, "dándole importancia a la comprensión auditiva, a la comprensión de textos orales y escritos, y a la pronunciación correcta de los vocablos en inglés para hacer uso del idioma de una manera natural" (Herrera Cabrera, 2019, p. 27).

At the end of the twentieth century the communicative method was introduced, which has had great relevance over the years, it focuses on developing the oral skills of students through the continuous interaction it creates among them. According to Richards & Rodgers (who quoted Peña Ledesma, 2019):

Los lingüistas en su libro "*Approaches and Methods in language Teaching*", afirman que el método más utilizado es el comunicativo (que apareció en 1980), y afirman que este método ha dado lugar a nuevas y más actuales ramificaciones que se usan para enseñar inglés. (p. 29)

Nowadays, the most widely used methods for teaching English are those that, besides providing scenarios with communicative purposes, emphasize the importance of pronunciation and phonetic recognition when interacting orally, with the aim of making the learner sound more native.

In the current context, especially for phoneme differentiation, those methods that facilitate the distinction of sounds that are usually confused in the oral practice of English have been reintroduced. "En base a esta suposición, los docentes en función de su realidad y posibilidad deben hacer lo mejor que puedan para que no contribuyan a una situación totalmente adversa para la enseñanza de un idioma extranjero" (Estupiñan Medina, 2021, p. 20).

1.2 Conceptual referential characterization of the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme in the teaching-learning process of the English language in basic general education. The role of minimal pairs as a teaching-learning method.

This section presents the characteristics of the object of study, the action field, and the variable of the research. It also specifies the methods and resources to be used in the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” in the teaching-learning process of the English language in basic general education.

1.2.1 Theoretical characteristics of the teaching-learning process of the English language in basic general education.

Within the teaching-learning process of the English language, pronunciation does not have great importance, as well as it is implemented inappropriately with methods that are not efficient for its development. As mentioned by Szyszksa (2016) (who quoted Negrete Saltos, 2021) on pronunciation in the teaching of a foreign language "where the perspective of the teacher is

relevant, since it is considered that the difficulties in this area are due to neglect in the educational process, that is, in all the respective stages of education" (p. 9).

In this same sense, Guisarre Espejo (2018) mentions that:

Los estudiantes de habla hispana tienen dificultad para producir los sonidos vocálicos y consonánticos de la lengua anglosajona, lo que se debe en parte a que esos sonidos individuales y/o conectados no existen en el español; por lo que se requiere un trabajo sistemático dirigido por el profesor, para que el estudiante logre desarrollar las competencias lingüísticas necesarias requeridas. (p. 39)

One of the best ways to improve the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal "th" phoneme is by applying methods focused essentially on phonemic distinction so that students recognize those segments with consonantal similarity that maintain certain words. This is highlighted by Ashby & Maidment (who quoted Patiño Abril, 2019) that "in order to prove conclusively that a phonetic distinction is contrastive in a particular language it is necessary to find a pair of words in the language that differ in only one segment" (p. 12).

By outlining some teaching-learning methods related to the development of this sub-skill can be found:

The direct method which is based on "una metodología de enseñanza cuyo objetivo principal es la integración social de los estudiantes. En él, los estudiantes comparten el conocimiento que tienen. Además, los gestos, las imágenes y las simulaciones se utilizan para la comunicación, siempre en inglés" (Palenzuela, 2014, quoted by Estupiñan, 2021, p. 19).

It is distinguished by creating an environment that motivates students to improve their oral comprehension through the development of activities that allow an active and fluid

communication, focusing on the correction of pronunciation and giving way to the acquisition of new vocabulary.

On the other hand, Rhalmi (2017) (who quoted Gualavisi Irua, 2021) claims that:

The objective of the audiolingual method is accurate pronunciation and grammar, the ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations and knowledge of sufficient vocabulary to use with grammar patterns. Particular emphasis was laid on mastering the building blocks of language and learning the rules for combining them. (p. 9)

Likewise, authors Ricoy & Álvarez (2016) (who quoted Rivera-Fortty et al., 2021) state that the audio-visual method "se sustenta en el empleo de recursos visuales y auditivos para desarrollar la capacidad de escucha y de comprensión del lenguaje hablado a través de la interacción" (p. 419).

This way, the audio-visual method employs a more dynamic and interactive teaching in the student that "resulta muy atractiva y despierta el interés de los estudiantes, involucrándolos activamente en su proceso de aprendizaje" (Herrera Cabrera, 2019, p. 27).

The communicative method, according to Rivera-Fortty et al. (2021) is based on the rules that integrate the communicative process, that is, "hablar para mejorar su pronunciación, y escuchar para interpretar el mensaje, teniendo como resultados individuos capaces de conversar en una nueva lengua, sin la ayuda de traductores, señas u otras estrategias" (p. 420).

All these methods are closely related to the constructivist theory because, according to Matajira Robayo (2019), teaching focuses on "las dimensiones interpersonal, comunicativa y social; en donde se retoma la concepción de la situación comunicativa como una comunidad de aprendices en la que el conocimiento se distribuye de manera interpersonal, espacial y temporalmente" (p. 29).

Other characteristics that underlie the implementation and development of these methods that are based on the constructivist theory are that the student actively participates in the creation of his or her own knowledge; likewise, language is considered as a fundamental aspect in the construction of the student's cognitive structures (Matajira Robayo, 2019).

Due to the demand that the teaching of English has had, the teaching-learning methods have been innovating, however, all of them are introduced with the same objective, to facilitate the efficient acquisition of the language in the learners. Each method focuses on the production of different skills, while some give more importance to the study of the grammatical rules of the English language, others emphasize the development of oral skills, considering the sub-skills that compose it, such as pronunciation.

Methods such as the minimal pair that, although it was introduced in previous years, currently has regained the relevance it had from the beginning, all this due to the dismissal that nowadays has been given to pronunciation in the process of teaching and learning the English language, as stated by Hismanoglu (2006) (who quoted Patiño Abril, 2019) in his degree thesis when mentioning that "the role of pronunciation is important in the English language, but somehow, teachers do not pay attention to this important part of communication" (p. 9).

According to Novarita et al. (2020):

Pronunciation is the most important aspect in learning English, it is the way in which a language or particular words pronounced or viewed how people utter a word or words that created a good speech, so it be clearly and can be understood by people. When people communicate with other people, they should not only have a good vocabulary but also have good pronunciation, it means that, when speaking a foreign language, say English, pronunciation is of great importance. (p. 246)

The use of minimal pair as a learning method for pronunciation improvement is based on testing the phonetic distinction that English possesses, as well as the need to find different words in the same language that are distinguished, in terms of their pronunciation, in a single segment or sound. The study of this phonetic contrast helps the learner to become familiar with the sounds of English language, and thus practice them correctly, being of great use to both the speaker and the listener during a conversation (Nur & Fadhilah Rahman, 2018).

Authors Nur & Fadhilah Rahman (2018) highlight research conducted by Fatmawati on the application of minimal pairs to improve the pronunciation of consonantal, voiced and unvoiced sounds that composed the English language, where through the method implemented students were able to easily differentiate the voiced and unvoiced of words that possessed similar consonants (p. 278).

Furthermore, Novarita et al. (2020) highlight that becoming familiar with the minimal pair has great significance in the learning of consonant sounds, because in this way students have the ability to distinguish and produce similar sounds, creating a clear and understandable speech, by highlighting pronunciation as a basic component of the English language that must be learned and studied.

Therefore, the use of resources such as music and interactive videos facilitates the recognition of sounds to encourage creative and inductive learning in students. Thus, "al enseñar un sonido específico es probable que, si el mismo se separa del resto de la palabra o vocablo, se ayude más efectivamente al estudiante" (Guisarre Espejo, 2018, p. 45).

Such resources also help in the evaluation of the acquired knowledge through the implementation of interactive activities, since "la nueva evaluación consiste en valorar los resultados de los discentes. Se trata de la educación por competencias, que fomenta la participación

activa del alumno en su propia formación. Los conocimientos adquiridos deben servir para actuar" (Ambomo, 2019, p. 74). In other words, nowadays it is no longer evaluated in the traditional way it used to be done, through exams, portfolios, etc., but through the same activities that are carried out in the classroom.

1.2.2 Characteristics of phoneme differentiation for pronunciation improvement in the acquisition of a second language.

In the learning of a second language, the development of speaking skills is fundamental to maintain good pronunciation, since it allows the student to easily understand and distinguish some words that are usually confused by their phonetic similarity during a conversation.

The author Yoshida (2014) (who quoted Schibli Lopez, 2020) states that:

Para distinguir los fonemas podemos hacer la siguiente prueba: si al cambiar un sonido por otro, en una palabra, esta palabra pierde o cambia de significado, esos dos sonidos serían dos fonemas distintos. Por ejemplo, “*walk /wɔk/*” con “*talk /tɔk/*” o con “*zalk /zɔk/*”. En donde en el primer caso (*walk* con *talk*) hay un cambio de significado del verbo caminar por el verbo hablar. (p. 46)

In this way, phoneme differentiation focuses on the voiced and unvoiced consonantal sounds that make up a word, as well as on their phonetic transcription which allows the learner a much clearer and more accurate pronunciation. In addition, according to Valga Savero (2019) consonantal sounds "se producen cuando en su emisión existe una aproximación a los órganos articulatorios que obstaculiza en algún punto la salida del aire al exterior" (p. 37).

In this regard, (Guisarre Espejo, 2018, pp. 41-43) points out that:

Mejorar la pronunciación en inglés no es solo un tema de verbalizar bien los fonemas de los vocablos aislados, sino también de ser capaz de sonar como un nativo de ese idioma.

Así entran en escena otros aspectos que van más allá de la simple pronunciación de los fonemas pues se necesita desarrollar también la acentuación, la entonación y el ritmo porque estos aportan claridad y emotividad al discurso.

- **Acentuación (*stress*):** es el énfasis que se da a una determinada sílaba dentro de una palabra, o bien a una palabra específica dentro de una frase.
- **Entonación (*intonation*):** se refiere a cómo decimos las cosas, no a qué decimos. Es la manera en que la voz sube o baja. Es decir, la música de la lengua. En inglés existen dos patrones básicos de entonación: la entonación baja y la entonación alta. Se debe recordar que los vocablos de contenido se enfatizan y la entonación añade actitud o emoción a las palabras.
- **Ritmo (*rhythm*):** es el sentido de movimiento en el discurso que de manera específica marcan la acentuación, el tiempo y el número de sílabas. Para los hablantes no-nativos es importante entender y dominar el ritmo del inglés; si se enfatiza la palabra incorrecta en una oración, o si todas las palabras se pronuncian con la misma fuerza términos de tiempo, intensidad o volumen de voz, entonces el discurso será difícil de entender.

All of this will help the student sound more native by improving his or her pronunciation due to the recognition of these essential elements, which emphasize how each word can be said, with the intention of being able to understand that minimal unit (phoneme) that should not be omitted in language teaching.

Based on the previous premise, Thornbury (1997) (who quoted Rodríguez Ludeña, 2019) proposes:

La alternancia de la práctica de percepción y producción del siguiente modo: comenzamos con ejercicios de percepción en los que se presentan oposiciones en pares mínimos — *hat-*

hut— con el fin de hacer un entrenamiento auditivo y que el alumno perciba las diferencias de cualidad a nivel perceptivo; una vez que se distinguen los sonidos auditivamente, se facilitan pistas articulatorias para que el alumno pueda posteriormente producir dichos sonidos en ejercicios de producción en contextos de pares mínimos; por último se procede a la práctica de la percepción y de la producción de dichos sonidos a nivel de frase. (p. 32)

Taking into account all the concepts of different authors on phonemic differentiation, and focusing on the conceptualization of the author Yoshida (2014) (quoted by Schibli López, 2020), it is considered that to work the variable of the present research, it is necessary to change a fragment or sound that makes up a word to recognize how this phonemic change affects pronunciation, and consequently, identify the contrast that is generated in comparison to another similar word that differs in that single sound or phoneme. In addition, based on the concept of Guisarre Espejo (2018) aspects such as accentuation, intonation, and rhythm, are indicators that serve as aspects to consider to conceptually focus on phoneme differentiation.

1.3 Contextual characterization of the teaching-learning process of the English language and the teaching-learning methods.

The contextual background consists of delimiting the teaching-learning process of English in terms of phonemic differentiation within the national educational system. As well as the methods used to produce pronunciation as a sub-skill in the teaching of a new language.

1.3.1 Teaching-learning process of the English language in the Ecuadorian educational system.

The English language is one of the most studied and required foreign languages in the working market. Therefore, its teaching is an important part within the Ecuadorian educational system, thus, "el Gobierno Nacional ha estado pendiente en mejorar la calidad de educación en

todas las áreas desde que se realizó la reunión en Dakar en el año 2000" (Peña Ledesma, 2019, p. 25).

Accordingly, the country committed itself to enhance each of the educational areas within the curriculum with the intention of improving the intellectual and cognitive abilities of students. In accordance with Peña Ledesma (2019) indicates that:

En 2011 a través de la actualización de la Reforma Curricular, que realizó transformaciones en la estructura de mallas en todas las asignaturas y comenzó con el proyecto “Es hora de enseñar inglés”. En él se intentó mejorar el sistema de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, y se tomaron en cuenta aspectos de metodología y competencias docentes. (p. 26)

In relation to what has been stated, the Ecuadorian government has recognized the importance of English as a tool for economic and social development, implementing programs and policies to improve the teaching and learning of the language in the country.

For such reason, Peña Ledesma (2019) in his research paper outlines that:

En abril de 2016, el Consejo de Educación Superior, en el Codificado del Reglamento de Educación Superior, artículo 31, estableció que los estudiantes universitarios deben alcanzar un nivel B2, intermedio alto, de acuerdo al Marco Común Europeo para poder graduarse. (p. 27)

However, the teaching-learning process of English in Ecuador has deficiencies, as evidenced by the special report of the EF English Proficiency Index, where the country is ranked last in language proficiency with respect to other Latin American countries (EF, 2022). According to Negrete Saltos (2021) the production of English "needs to become a main focus on Ecuadorian

education considering that a foreign language is a resource that will help students develop themselves academically and professionally with the demands of the modern world" (p. 2).

As Peña Ledesma (2019) states, "los esfuerzos del Gobierno Nacional se han extendido por varios años y han intentado fomentar una nueva estructura en la enseñanza del idioma inglés; sin embargo, no han tenido continuidad ni seguimiento" (p. 27). With the entry of the new rulers, the hours assigned to the teaching of English were reduced from five hours per week to three; therefore, the progress of the language had a major decline in Ecuadorian education.

The national curriculum is focused on the production of communicative skills; however, students present a low level of development of oral language skill (Encalada Torres, 2022). One of the main reasons for this failure is that, even though the curriculum stipulated by the Ministry of Education is based on the progress of this productive skill, teachers do not implement the precise methods that promote the development of the communicative process in students, much less of those elements that constitute the oral development of English, such as pronunciation.

Therefore, Severino (2015) (who quoted Viviana de las Mercedes, 2019) states that:

En los últimos años, la metodología ecuatoriana ha cambiado y se entiende a la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras como medio de comunicación oral. Esto significa no solo desarrollar en los alumnos los conocimientos, hábitos y habilidades necesarios para comunicarse a través de ellas oralmente, sino también desarrollar sus capacidades para que puedan valerse de las lenguas extranjeras como instrumento de comunicación. (pp. 27-28)

The sub-skills that the oral process possesses are not considered in language teaching; there are no applied methods that promote their production. According to Encalada Torres (2022):

El déficit vocal que presentan los estudiantes es elevado, para corregir estas dificultades, se propone la implementación de métodos interactivos para fortalecer las múltiples

capacidades que posee el estudiante proporcionando un ambiente confortable de estudio, interés en la producción oral, confianza y perfeccionamiento vocal. (p. 71)

1.3.2 Diagnosis of the current state of knowledge on the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the high school “9 de Octubre”.

This section details the results obtained from the diagnosis made to the tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre". The following instruments were used for data collection: (APPENDIX 1) an observation guide, (APPENDIX 2) a pre-test.

Analysis of the results

The observation guide was the first instrument used, which provided the following results:

- Students do not know the variations of the consonantal phoneme “*th*”.
- Most of the students make mistakes when pronouncing words that are composed of the two types of sounds that the phoneme “*th*” presents.
- Students are not exposed to the study and recognition of phonological differentiation.
- The classes lack resources and didactic strategies that allow spaces for phonological awareness.

The second instrument applied was a pre-test which was elaborated through five questions that evaluated specific aspects at the time of recognizing the differentiation between phonemes, all this with the purpose of knowing the state of knowledge that tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre" have. The analysis of the results obtained based on the previously selected indicators is presented below.

Indicator: Stress

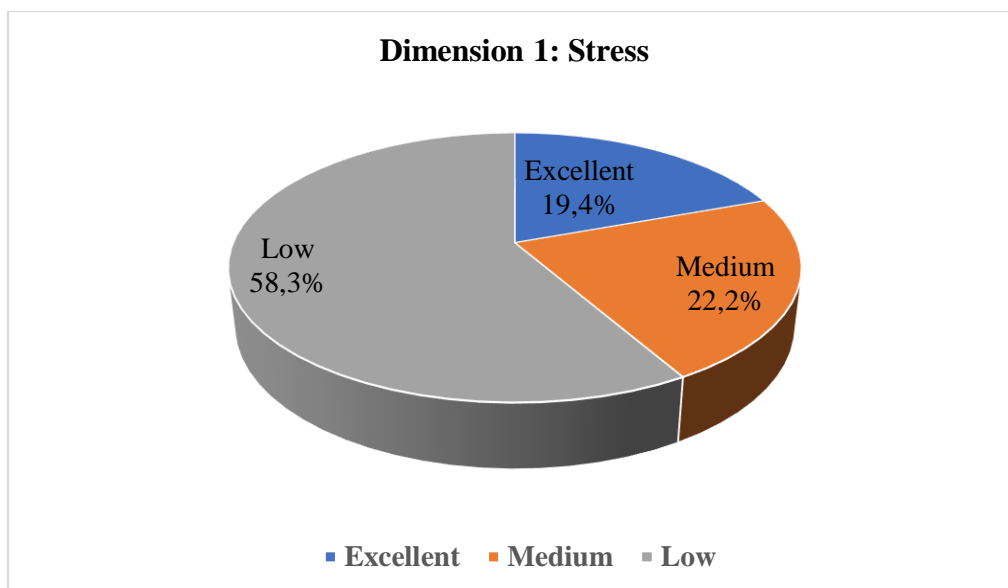


Illustration 1. Indicator. Stress. Elaborated by the authors.

When working with phonemes and their variations, pronunciation and those aspects that compose it, such as stress, intonation and rhythm, are very important. According to (Negrete Saltos, 2021), the study of English pronunciation and the characteristics that supplement them should be assimilated in the learning of the language, because the sounds that English has are not identical to the sounds of the speaker's native language, where there are fundamental differences such as stress, rhythm and intonation of words.

The results of the pre-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "stress", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 7 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 19.4%. On the other hand, 8 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 22.2%. And finally, 21 students, being most of the group, present a low level (L), which corresponds to 58.3% of the population.

Indicator: Rhythm

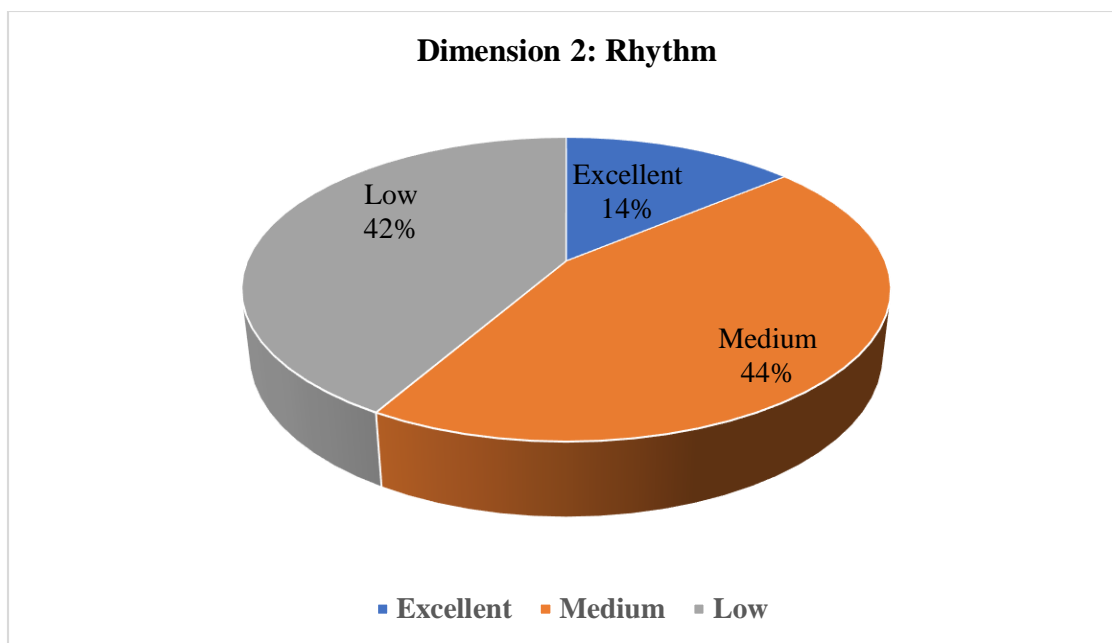


Illustration 2. Indicador. Rhythm. Elaborated by the authors.

The English language according to Galguera González (2019) is “una lengua de compas acentual en la que los patrones rítmicos marcan alteraciones vocálicas y consonánticas como el debilitamiento y la reducción, los rasgos prosódicos desempeñan un papel fundamental en la producción natural y casi nativa del habla” (p. 21). It is for this reason that, during the teaching of English pronunciation, another suprasegmental feature to consider is rhythm, since, in this way, the effect of rhythmic patterns in the production of sounds or phonemes of the language is recognized.

According to the results of the pre-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "rhythm": out of 36 students, 5 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 14%, that is, less than a quarter of the total population. On the other hand, most students are in a medium and low level with respect to the evaluated indicator, among these 16 students are in a medium level (M), corresponding to 44%. And finally, 15 students have a low level (L), which corresponds to 42%.

Indicator: Intonation

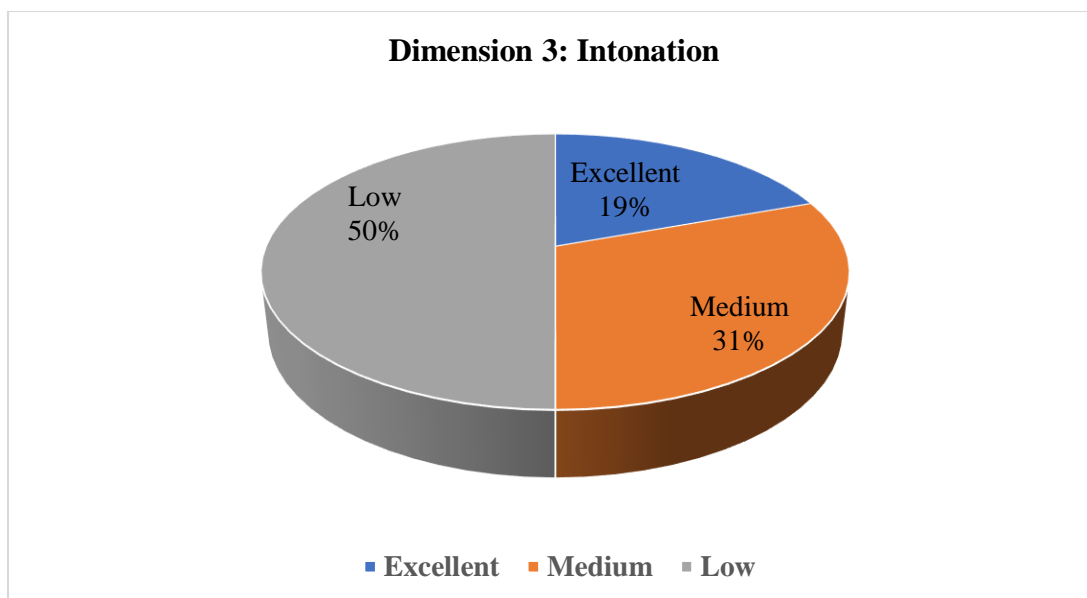


Illustration 3. Indicator. Intonation. Elaborated by the authors.

Intonation refers to the change produced by the rise and fall of the voice when speaking, according to Alemán Trujillo (2020) “los patrones de entonación pueden ser dificultosos de entender, aunque los sonidos individuales son perfectos correctos y claros” (p. 52). For this reason, it is important to assess this indicator when working with phoneme pronunciation.

The results of the pre-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "intonation", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 7 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 19%. On the other hand, 11 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 31%. And finally, 18 students, being half of the group, that is, 50% of the population, present a low level (L).

Indicator: Phonological listening comprehension

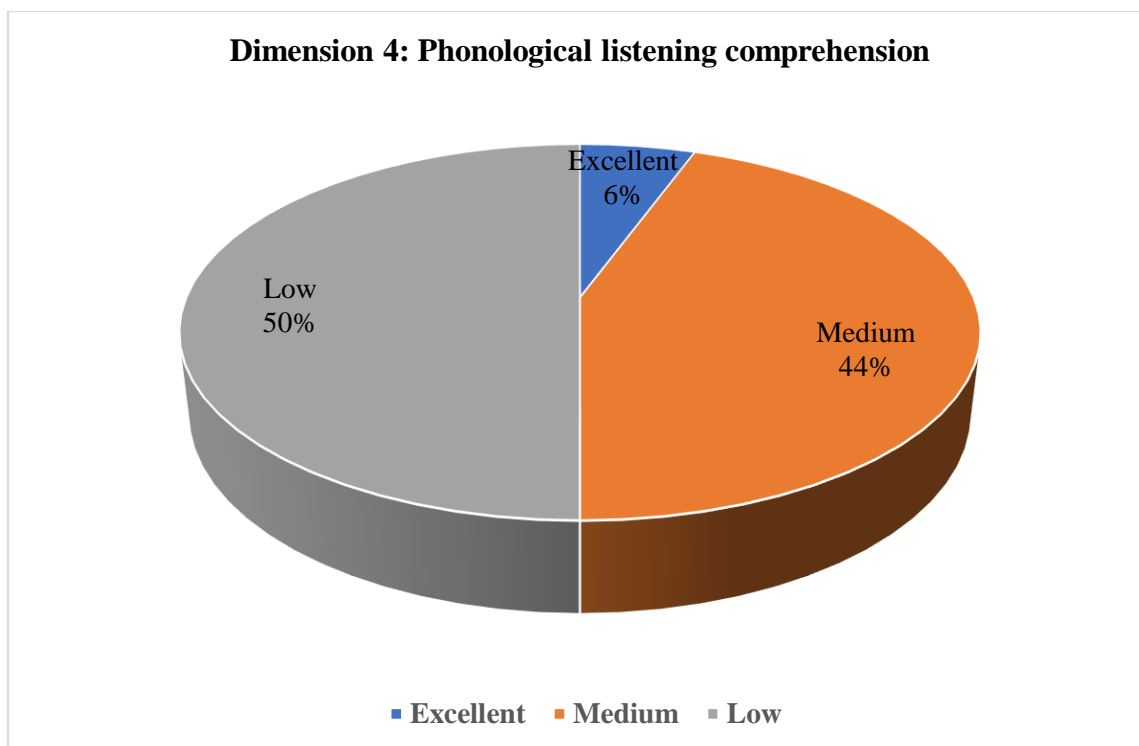


Illustration 4. Phonological listening comprehension. Elaborated by the authors.

This indicator refers to the listening comprehension that occurs as a cognitive ability in the development of English language learning, this factor composes various processes, as Pérez Cano (2019) points out that of all the processes involved “los que menos atención han recibido en la didáctica de la L2 han sido los procesos de base que la psicolingüística ha identificado como el sistema de percepción y los procesos de la segmentación de la cadena fónica” (p. 81).

The results of the pre-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "phonological listening comprehension", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 2 are at an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 6%. On the other hand, 16 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 44%. And finally, 18 students present a low level (L), which corresponds to 50% of the population, that is, half of the group.

General diagnosis

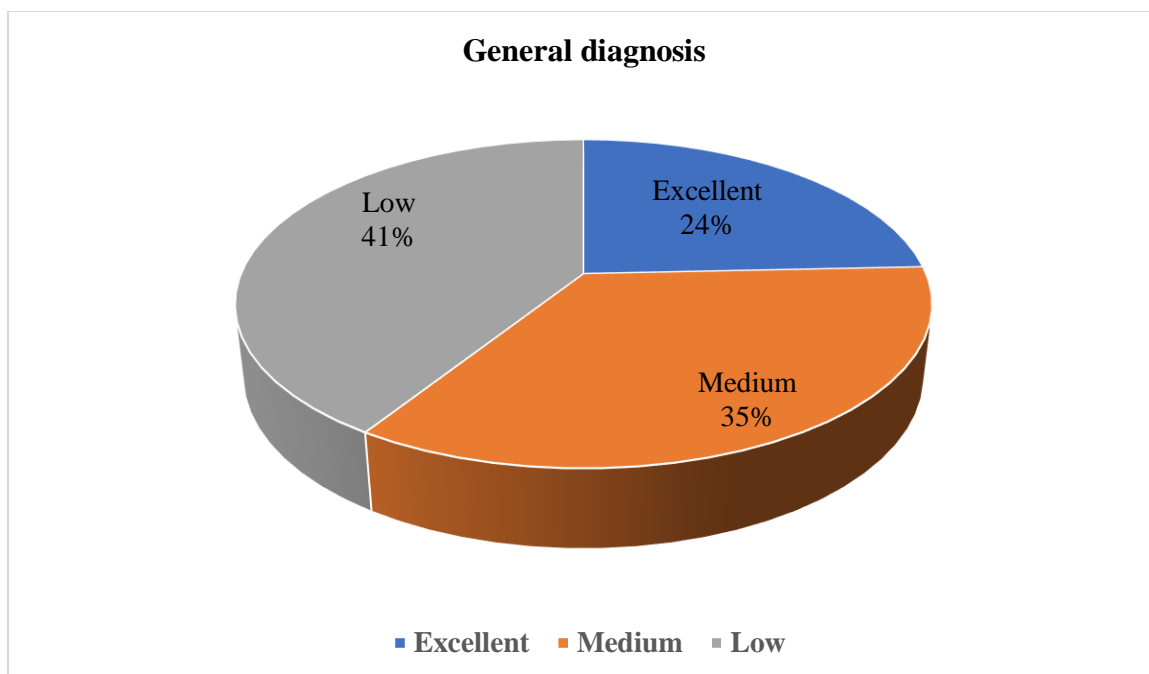


Illustration 5. General diagnosis. Elaborated by the authors.

Through the detailed graphs and the data obtained, the general diagnosis places the tenth-grade students, parallel "A" in the following level: 41% have a low level, a medium level corresponding to 35%, and only 24% of the students with an excellent level, all this with respect to the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced "th" phoneme.

Consequently, once the instruments were used to collect the results, it was possible to conclude that more than half of the students had no knowledge of the variations of the "th" phoneme, much less differentiate the sounds it has. Thus, with the results obtained, it is necessary to apply a didactic strategy that help to improve the current state of the students with respect to the "th" phoneme, taking into account the same indicators used in the pre-test as a way to improve the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced "th" phoneme of the tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" High School.

Chapter 2

Methodological Framework

This chapter defines the different fundamental methodological aspects to achieve the previously established objectives. Beginning with the description of the methodological paradigm, followed by the type and design of research, which will help determine the appropriate theoretical and empirical methods that will lead to the use of instruments and techniques for collecting information from the selected population.

2.1 Research paradigm

The present research is based on a quantitative paradigm because this approach allows the objective analysis of the study phenomenon, to obtain reliable research data oriented to the result, validating or not the previously established hypothesis.

Thus, the quantitative methodological paradigm is “parte de un sistema hipotético deductivo que reafirma la relevancia de hacer del conocimiento un proceso sistemático y medible dentro del marco del control empírico y el análisis causal de los fenómenos” (Miranda Beltrán & Ortiz Bernal, 2020, p. 8).

2.2 Research design

This study is of an explanatory type, since it seeks to understand and explain the causes that allow the correct differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th". In addition, the research focuses on an experimental design, through the application of a pedagogical test that evaluates the current knowledge of students with respect to the English language, and analyzes the results produced from the use of a didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs" in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre".

In this sense, “el diseño de la investigación o diseño metodológico de una investigación

encierra el conjunto de procedimientos racionales y sistemáticos, encaminados a hallar la solución de un problema y, finalmente, verificar o demostrar la verdad de un conocimiento” (Niño Rojas, 2011, p. 54).

2.3 Population

The population to be studied “está constituida por una totalidad de unidades, vale decir, por todos aquellos elementos (personas, animales, objetos, sucesos, fenómenos, etcétera) que pueden conformar el ámbito de una investigación” (Niño Rojas, 2011, p. 55). Therefore, the population selected for this research is made up of a group of 17 males and 19 females, giving a total of 36 students of the tenth-grade, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre".

2.4 Research methods

Research methods are defined as “el conjunto de técnicas que, coherentes con la orientación de una investigación y el uso de determinadas herramientas, permitirán la obtención de un producto o resultado particular” (Sánchez Kohn, s.f.).

In other words, research methods are the most rigorous way to approach the essence of a specific phenomenon, they comprise a series of systematic processes through which scientific investigations are formulated, hypotheses are examined and the effectiveness of research tools is evaluated to reach the most accurate result and achieve the previously determined objectives. They are classified into theoretical and empirical methods:

2.4.1 Theoretical methods

Theoretical methods are those oriented to research, proper to the mind of the researcher; the essential connections and fundamental attributes that cannot be perceived through the senses, are revealed using this method. In this way, “los métodos teóricos posibilitan procesar los resultados obtenidos mediante el uso de los métodos empíricos, sistematizarlos, analizarlos,

explicarlos, descubrir qué tienen en común, para llegar a conclusiones confiables que permitan resolver el problema” (Ortiz, 2012; Zoya & Roggero, 2015; Rodríguez, 2017, as quoted from López Falcón & Ramos Serpa, 2021, p. 24).

Historical-logical method

The validity of this research method lies in the examination of the historical context surrounding the object of study; this analysis seeks to discover the various stages of its progression and growth over time. According to López Falcón y Ramos Serpa (2021) “el método histórico-lógico considera que toda investigación debe incluir en su unidad el estudio tanto de los aspectos históricos como lógicos que caracterizan al fenómeno estudiado, analizando el objeto de estudio en el tiempo y en su movimiento” (p. 25).

Analytic-synthetic method

The analytic-synthetic method “considera que el proceso investigativo de manera consciente e intencional el análisis y la síntesis deben ocurrir en estrecha unidad e interrelación” (López Falcón & Ramos Serpa, 2021, p. 24). In this research the use of this method is based on the decomposition of the whole object of study into its parts and characteristics, followed by a synthesis that achieves the integration of the previously analyzed parts.

Hypothetico-deductive method

The hypothetico-deductive method is used in the hypothesis construction of the research, which is inferred through deduction, and is validated or not when subjected to empirical verification; likewise, the method is detailed, consequently, in the formulation of conclusions derived from the same hypothesis, which may generate the need to reformulate the established premise if a logical inconsistency is evidenced (Rodríguez Jiménez & Pérez Jacinto, 2017, p. 12).

2.4.2 Empirical methods

These methods facilitate “revelar las relaciones esenciales y las características fundamentales en el comportamiento real del objeto de estudio” (Rojas Plasencia, Vilaú Aguiar, & Camejo Puentes, 2018, p. 239). Consequently, empirical methods are those that strive to acquire knowledge through observation and study of reality, as such, it has its roots in first-hand experience; its initial phase consists of observing and analyzing reality as a basis for developing hypotheses, these hypotheses are subsequently tested through the process of experimentation.

Experimental method

This method was based on the research by modifying the conditions of the object of study, through the manipulation of the variables with the purpose of controlling their effect and determining their variation according to the didactic strategy applied in the population of this research work.

Observation method

Scientific observation is a “método en el cual la información llega al investigador de forma directa por la percepción del objeto o fenómeno estudiado” (López Falcón & Ramos Serpa, 2021, p. 26). The present research made use of this method by witnessing the reality of the students with respect to the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme, using, in addition, as an empirical technique of the research, the pedagogical tests that allow an objective control and a valid measurement of the process.

Measurement

Measurement is fundamental in research as it is an essential process that allows obtaining reliable data from an accurate collection of information from the selected population with the aim of answering the research question and achieve the desired objectives. In fact, “se puede decir que

la medición es la atribución de valores numéricos a las propiedades de los objetos” (Espinoza Freire & Toscano Ruíz, 2015, p. 46).

Pedagogical test

The present research work used a pedagogical test with a set of questions related to the consonantal, voiced and unvoiced “th” phoneme, which allow measuring the current knowledge of the selected population, in order to determine what are their limitations or deficiencies in the pre-test and, at the same time, analyze the results produced in the post-test from the use of a didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs".

In this regard, the authors (Lara-Freire, Rojas-Yumisaca, & Cabezas-Arévalo, 2020) mention that:

La prueba diagnóstica, orienta la intervención del docente en distintos aspectos; por ejemplo, el tiempo que dedicará a los temas; en otras palabras, a la práctica docente. Esta toma de decisión didáctica que se define con la aplicación de una evaluación diagnóstica apuesta a un mejor logro de competencias de los estudiantes y favorecen los procesos de aprendizaje. (p. 315)

2.5 Data collection

2.5.1 Research instruments

This research work takes the “differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme” as the variable of study. In this sense, the following consistency matrix was created:

Scientific problem	Aims	Hypothesis	Research variables	Measurement indicators	Items
How to improve the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school?	General Aim: to elaborate a didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.	If a didactic strategy is applied through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method, the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” will be achieved in the English classes of tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.	<p>1. The independent variable: Didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs”.</p> <p>2. The dependent variable: Differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.</p>	<p>Phonological listening comprehension: Recognize stress and intonation to understand the phoneme.</p> <p>Stress: Position and precision of the tongue.</p> <p>Intonation: Vibration of the vocal cords.</p> <p>Rhythm: Sense of movement that specifically marks stress, time, and number of syllables.</p>	<p>2,3</p> <p>1 (letter a)</p> <p>1 (letter b)</p> <p>1 (letter c)</p>

Table 1. Consistency matrix. Elaborated by the authors.

2.6 Data analysis

The information obtained is analyzed taking as a measure the level of comprehension that the student has. For this purpose, the level of comprehension in the "Differentiation of the “th” phoneme" is stratified as follows: Excellent, Medium and Low, which allow us to optimally analyze the established indicators, as shown in the following table:

Indicators	Analysis		
	Excellent comprehension	Medium comprehension	Low comprehension
Phonological listening comprehension	Students fully understand the difference between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.	Students are able to recognize the difference between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.	Students do not fully understand and recognize the difference between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.
Stress	Students have excellent positioning and accuracy of the tongue when using words containing the “th” phoneme.	Students have medium comprehension with respect to tongue position and accuracy when using words containing the “th” phoneme.	Students have no understanding of the position and accuracy of the tongue when using words containing the “th” phoneme.
Intonation	Students have an excellent pronunciation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.	Students have a good pronunciation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.	Students have a poor pronunciation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme.
Rhythm	Students have excellent fluency and rhythm in differentiating “th” phoneme.	Students have a good fluency and rhythm in differentiating “th” phoneme.	Students have poor fluency and rhythm in differentiating “th” phoneme.

Table 2. Indicators matrix. Elaborated by the authors.

In this chapter was presented the methodological design of the research, which serves as a fundamental pillar in the selection of the appropriate population, instruments and methods to achieve the established objectives and answer the research question.

Chapter 3

Intervention Proposal

Didactic strategy for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”

This chapter focuses on describing the practical contribution of the research, which consists of the application of a didactic strategy that involves practical activities based on "minimal pairs" to improve the differentiation of the consonantal, voiced and unvoiced phoneme "th" in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre".

3.1 Theoretical framework of a didactic strategy

Within the teaching-learning process, objectives and goals are set to be achieved, all of these to improve education and knowledge acquired by students, however, it should be emphasized that these same objectives are not achieved alone, there are always ways through which it is developed and, consequently, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge.

One of those ways is the didactic strategies, which according to Mansilla and Beltrán (2013, who quoted Orellana Guevara, 2017) defines them as: “la estructura de actividad en la que se hacen reales los objetivos y contenidos” (p. 3). Teachers are the ones who use didactic strategies as tools to make the teaching-learning process more efficient and effective.

Each student possesses basic knowledge that, once explored, can be exchanged with other students, and in this way, together build a new one. This is where didactic strategies become useful, because they help, in a methodical way, to plan the process that leads the information to the creation of learning, all this through didactics and methodology (Orellana Guevara, 2017, p. 4).

In this way, each didactic strategy is important and must be “coherente, en primer lugar, a la concepción pedagógica que comporta la institución educativa y, en segundo lugar, con los

componentes de la planificación curricular, específicamente, a los objetivos de aprendizaje y a los contenidos” (Vicerrectoría de la Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2013, p. 5).

In other words, for their elaboration they must be focused on what is to be achieved, be related to a didactic unit proposed in the curricular plan of the institution, and likewise, be planned according to the level of English that students have; in this way, the results obtained next to their application will be optimal and correct.

Other aspects to be considered by the teacher, according to Rovira Salvador (2018) are the following:

- Preparar todos aquellos materiales u objetos que serán necesarios para la enseñanza.
- Enfatizar los aspectos importantes de la información que se quiere transmitir.
- Promover la asociación de los conocimientos teóricos con los aspectos prácticos de estos.
- Fomentar la autonomía del alumno a la hora de generar estrategias propias de aprendizaje.
- El educador ha de ser consciente de que su rol es tan solo el de facilitar el aprendizaje y servir de guía en la adquisición de estrategias de aprendizaje.
- Realizar evaluaciones periódicas para constatar el progreso de los alumnos.

Furthermore, the tools and activities applied within the proposed didactic strategy must be attractive and interesting for the students, only in this way, it will be possible to keep their attention during the whole class, and, consequently, generate the acquisition of knowledge in an active way.

For this reason, our intervention proposal is based on the elaboration of a didactic strategy using interactive activities such as "minimal pairs" for its development. Thus, this type of activity “demuestra la importancia de la pronunciación en la comunicación oral y habitúa a los alumnos a usar una pronunciación precisa e interpretar los mensajes gracias a la conciencia fonética de las palabras” (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, who quoted Santos Clemente, 2017, p. 10).

Minimal pairs are the comparison of a single sound between two words, its objective is to demonstrate the importance of practicing the correct pronunciation of each sound in English. It has a dynamic practice since the students, in addition to visualizing it as an activity or task to accomplish, because it has an interactive theme, consider it as a game due to the motivational sense that it produces in the students when practicing the pronunciation of phonemes, in a practical way, and not in a theoretical way.

3.2 Description of the didactic strategy for the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”

Once having observed that more than half of the students in the tenth-grade, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre" fail to recognize and understand the variation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th", it has been developed a didactic strategy, through the use of "minimal pairs", for the phonological differentiation of this phoneme, to guide and strengthen students learning, using a series of activities linked to the skills of listening and speaking that allow the recognition of the sounds.

WEEK 1

- **Class N.-1**
- **Topic:** Awareness of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.
- **Objective:** SWBA to distinguish the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” through continued pronunciation and listening practice in applied activities.
- **Date:** August 3, 2023
- **Didactic strategy:** Minimal Pairs
- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Procedure:** Introduction, development, and conclusion

- **Resources:** Blackboard, markers, worksheet, notebook, students

Introduction (5 minutes)

The class begins with a lead-in to create interest in the students about the topic to be discussed, introducing new vocabulary that will be used during the development of the class through a dynamic activity that encourages students' participation.

Development (30 minutes)

Then, the class continues with a brief explanation of the concept of "minimal pairs" and the existence and importance of the consonantal phoneme "th" in the English language to maintain a clear and precise communication, for example: "Breath / brɛθ/ - Breathe / bri:ð/". Therefore, during the explanation, the teacher will familiarize the student, through auditory practice, some of the new vocabulary of words that have unvoiced / θ / and voiced sounds / ð / in an interactive and fun way.

In this way, creating a teaching environment where students are engaged with the language, as reflected in the "listening discrimination" activity that is applied through a choral drill to listen and pronounce each group of words clearly and slowly, identifying the difference in the "th" phoneme. For example: repeat and identify the difference in the sound of the following words "Thief / θi:f/ - They / ðeɪ/ - Bath / bɑ:θ/ - Bathe / beɪð/" allowing students to listen carefully and raise their hand if they manage to recognize any sound, as well as, if they show a similar pronunciation.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

It is given feedback of what has been learned during the class, as well as a small formative evaluation with a worksheet to reinforce the correct auditory discrimination.

WEEK 2

- **Class N.-2**
- **Topic:** Accurate pronunciation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.
- **Objective:** SWBA to produce accurately the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in everyday contexts.
- **Date:** August 10, 2023
- **Didactic strategy:** Minimal Pairs
- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Procedure:** Introduction, development, and conclusion
- **Resources:** Blackboard, markers, notebook, flashcards, students

Introduction (5 minutes)

The class begins with a warm-up to generate interest in the student and activate the class, in addition to giving feedback of the most important aspects that were taught in the previous class, as well as a previous explanation of the contents that will be taught during the development of the class.

Development (30 minutes)

The class continues with a detailed explanation by the teacher of how to accurately pronounce the voiced and unvoiced “th” sound, using visual examples of how to maintain the position of the lips and tongue at the moment of producing both sounds. For this, the teacher is guided by the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and the phonetic transcription of each word, with the purpose of making it easier for the student to identify the difference in sounds.

Based on this, an active practice is produced through a guided pronunciation that measures the student's level to continue with the following activity of "Pronunciation and production" where it will be provided similar words, through flashcards, related to an everyday context. The activity

will be done in pairs and consists of each group of students placing each pair of flashcards face down on their table, then taking one of them and pronouncing the word correctly, to later determine whether the produced sound is voiced or unvoiced. This teamwork will help them to hear the differences that exist in their own pronunciations.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

At the end of the class, any doubts of the student during the development of the class and use of the activity will be solved, followed by short feedback on the contents studied.

WEEK 3

- **Class N.-3**
- **Topic:** Daily conversations
- **Objective:** SWBA to use the voiced and unvoiced consonantal “th” phoneme in everyday sentences and conversations.
- **Date:** August 17, 2023
- **Didactic strategy:** Minimal Pairs
- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Procedure:** Introduction, development, and conclusion
- **Resources:** Blackboard, markers, notebook, cards, students.

Introduction (5 minutes)

The class begins with a warm-up to activate the class environment, recalling the contents and vocabulary learned in the previous class. In addition, the teacher explains in advance the topic and the activities that will be applied in the development of the class.

Development (30 minutes)

The class continues with a brief explanation from the teacher regarding the importance of

knowing how to recognize and differentiate the consonantal phoneme "th" in specific situations or contexts, to avoid misunderstandings by the student. Accordingly, it is applied a dynamic activity "Contextualized conversation", which provides reading exercises and small conversations that encourage students to use words containing the phoneme "th" in sentences of daily situations, for example: Question *"What do you think about this weather - Answer "I think it's great"*. Such an activity keeps certain similar words highlighted, "minimal pairs", and encourages active participation within the classroom, with teacher observation and guidance.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

At the end of the activity, feedback is given on the contents learned and any doubts the students may have must be resolved, motivating them to have confidence in themselves and to continue reinforcing the knowledge they have acquired.

In the present research work, the improvement in the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" can be achieved through a didactic strategy that aims to motivate young students to improve their oral comprehension through the development of dynamic activities using "minimal pairs", which allow evaluating their comprehension and identification of sounds from the evaluation indicators that have been established. In this way, to observe and analyze whether there was progress in the student by creating an active teaching environment related to phonetics.

Therefore, a didactic strategy was developed to understand and improve the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th", due to the fact that most of the students did not know the variations that make up the phoneme and made mistakes when pronouncing words that maintain these two sounds. The use of "minimal pairs" within the strategy allows the teacher to catch the students' attention through interactive activities (identification) that

promote phonological awareness within the diverse daily contexts of the student.

Subsequently, the results of its application within the school environment of students in the tenth-grade, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school are presented.

Chapter 4

Application of a didactic strategy through the use of “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th” in tenth-grade students, parallel “A” of the “09 de Octubre” high school.

This chapter presents the results obtained by applying a didactic strategy for the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre" during the school year 2023, on August 3, 10 and 17, where the activities were carried out based on an experimental design.

4.1 Description of the application of the didactic strategy using “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”

To assess the results of the didactic strategy applied for the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" by using "minimal pairs" as a method in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre", a series of activities were carried out. Each class will be described below:

Class 1: Awareness of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”

The first class was held on Thursday, August 3rd from 2:30 to 3:15 p.m. with the presence of all tenth-grade students, parallel "A". The class began with a lead-in to encourage interest and participation in students. Then, the class continued with a brief explanation of the concept of "minimal pairs" and the existence and importance of the consonantal phoneme "th" with the help of an informative guide and some examples with which the students were familiarized through a listening practice of some words that have unvoiced / θ / and voiced sounds / ð / interactively.

After that, an "listening discrimination" activity was applied to listen and pronounce each group of words clearly and slowly through a choral drill and identifying the difference in the

phoneme "th", which allowed students to raise their hands when recognizing a similar sound or pronunciation. Finally, feedback was given on what was learned during the class and a small worksheet was made to reinforce correct auditory discrimination.

Class 2: Accurate pronunciation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”.

The second class was held on Thursday, August 10 from 14:30 to 15:15 p.m. with the presence of all tenth-grade students, parallel "A". The class began with a warm-up to generate interest in the student and activate the class, along with feedback from the previous class. Likewise, the class continued with a detailed explanation of how to correctly pronounce the voiced and unvoiced sound "th", through the use of visual examples. For this, the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and the phonetic transcription of each word written on the blackboard were also used as a guide, with the purpose of making it easier for the student to identify the difference in sounds.

Based on this, there was an active practice through a guided pronunciation that measured the student's level, which allowed to continue with the "Pronunciation and production" activity in which each pair of students was provided with flashcards with similar words related to an everyday context. This activity helped them to hear the differences that exist in each word and in their own pronunciations. At the end of the class, any student's doubts were solved, followed by short feedback on the contents studied during the day.

Class 3: Daily conversations

The third class was held on Thursday, August 17 from 15:45 to 16:30 p.m. with the presence of all tenth-grade students, parallel "A". It began with a warm-up to activate the class environment, along with small feedback from the previous class. Then, the class continued with a brief explanation, regarding the importance of knowing how to recognize and differentiate the

consonantal phoneme "th" in specific situations or contexts, and a choral drill was performed with some examples (similar words) that were written on the blackboard, to avoid misunderstandings in the identification of those sounds by the students.

Accordingly, a dynamic activity was applied, "Contextualized conversations", which provided reading exercises and small conversations that encouraged active participation in the classroom, with the teacher's observation and guidance, when using words containing the phoneme "th" in everyday life situations. At the end of the activity, there was feedback on the contents learned and the students' doubts were solved, motivating them to trust themselves and reinforce the knowledge acquired.

4.2 Results obtained after the application of a didactic strategy using “minimal pairs” as a method for the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme “th”

The results obtained in the diagnostic test or pre-test were fundamental to understanding the poor or non-existent knowledge about the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced consonant phoneme "th". Due to this, the intervention proposal was to elaborate a didactic strategy using "minimal pairs" to improve the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th".

In this regard, the data obtained from the pre-test were compared with the data from the post-test through empirical methods that allowed the control and measurement of the process, obtaining the following new data:

Indicator: Stress

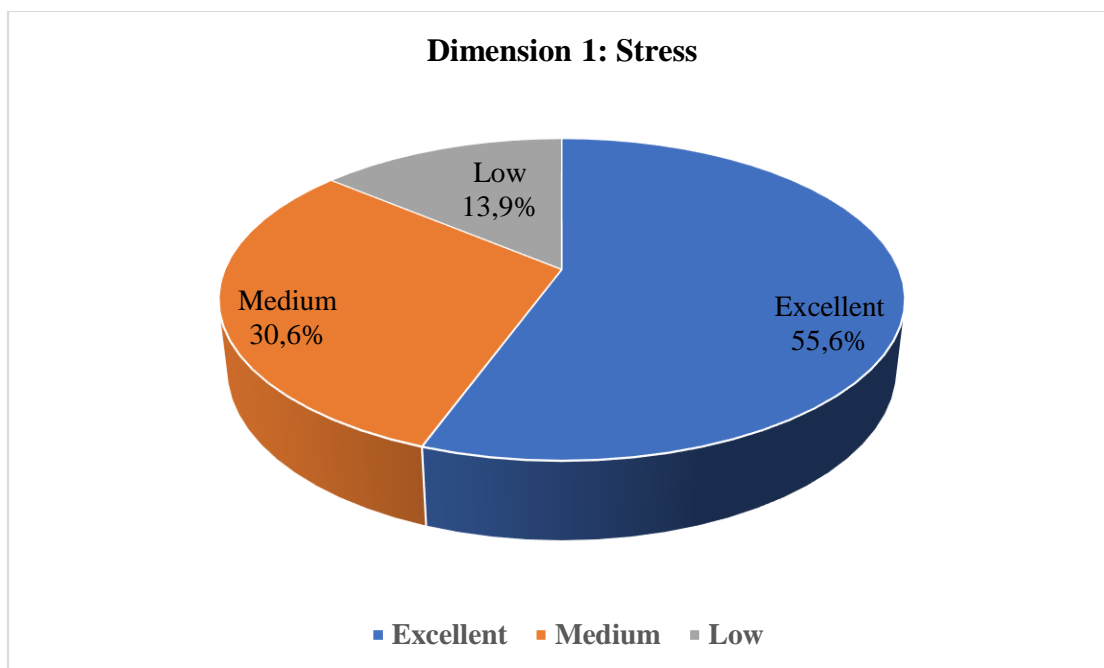


Illustration 6. Indicator. Stress. Elaborated by the authors.

The results of the post-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "stress", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 20 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 55.6%. On the other hand, 11 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 30.6%. And finally, 5 students, being these the remaining part of the group, present a low level (L), which corresponds to 13.9% of the population. These results indicate an improvement by showing that about 87% of the students were able to reach a medium to excellent level with respect to the stress of the phoneme "th", which doubles the results obtained previously in the same indicator in the pre-test.

Indicator: Rhythm

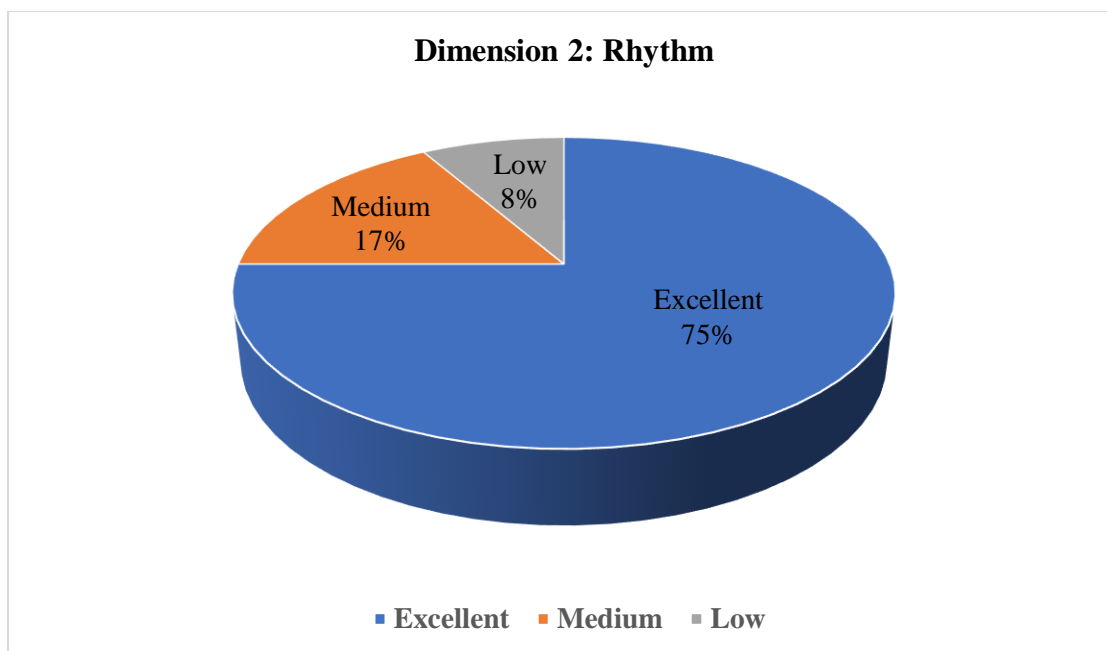


Illustration 7. Indicator. Rhythm. Elaborated by the authors.

The results of the post-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "rhythm", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 27 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 75%, the result of this indicator grew considerably with respect to the previous results obtained in the pre-test, where only 14% of the students reached this level. On the other hand, 6 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 17%. And finally, only 3 students, that is, 8% of the population, present a low level (L), which was notably minimized when comparing the results obtained in the pre-test, where almost half of the students were at this level.

Indicator: Intonation

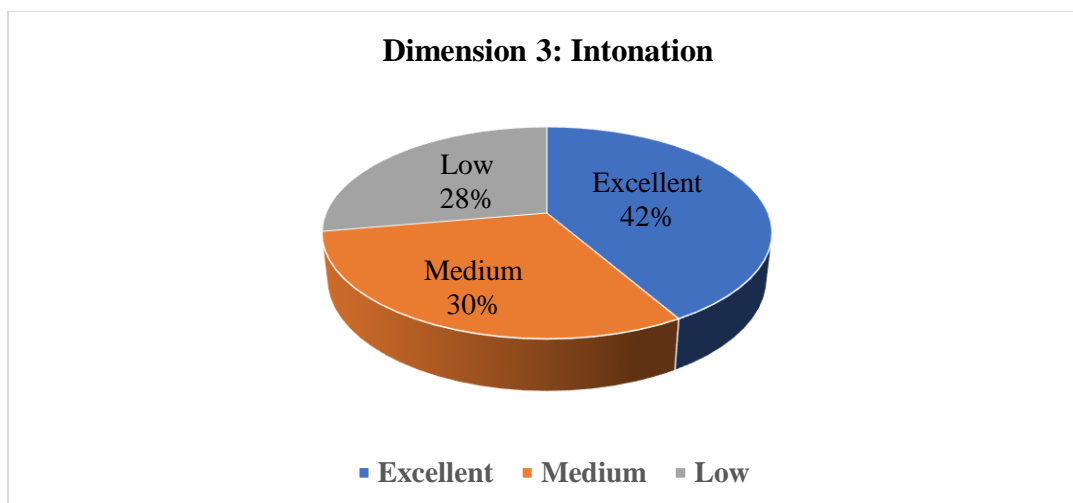


Illustration 8. Indicator. Intonation. Elaborated by the authors.

According to the results of the post-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "intonation": out of 36 students, 15 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 42% of the students, doubling the results obtained in the pre-test with respect to this same level. On the other hand, 11 students are at a medium level (M), which corresponds to 30% of the population. And finally, 10 students have a low level (L), which corresponds to 28%, which, compared to the results collected in the pre-test, minimizes almost half of the percentage previously achieved at the same level.

Indicador: Phonological listening comprehension

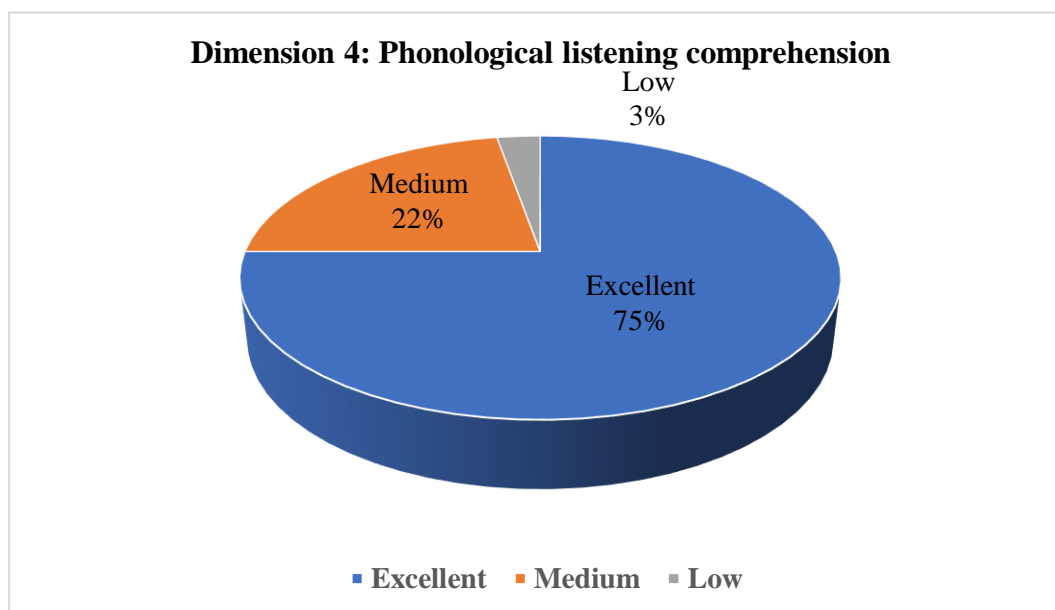


Illustration 9. Phonological listening comprehension. Elaborated by the authors.

The results of the post-test applied to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", related to the measurement indicator "phonological listening comprehension", were presented as follows: out of 36 students, 27 present an excellent level (E), which corresponds to 75%, changing in a positive and notorious way the results obtained in the pre-test with respect to the same level, where only 6% of the total population was located. On the other hand, 8 students present a medium level (M), corresponding to 22%. And finally, only 1 student presents a low level (L), which corresponds to 3% of the population, reaching a considerable difference, where in a pre-test, half of the students were located at the same level.

General diagnosis

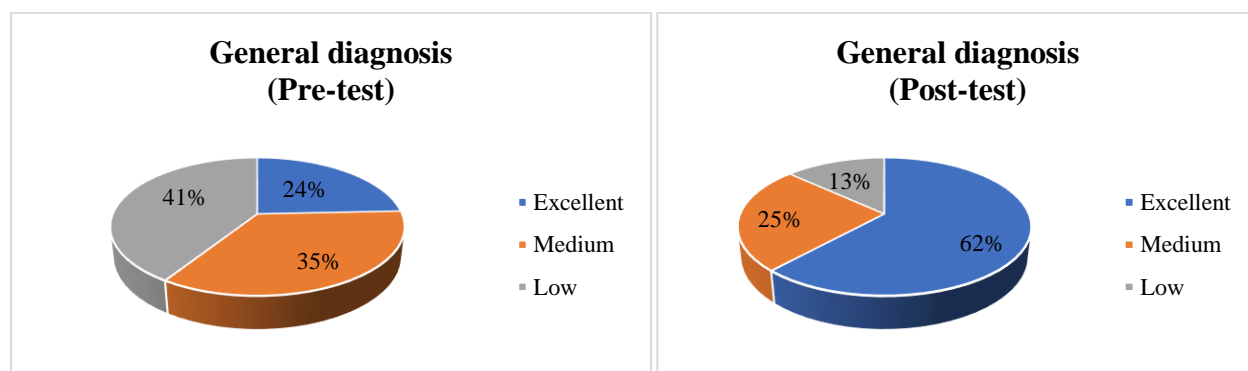


Illustration 10. General diagnosis (Post-test). Elaborated by the authors.

Through the detailed graphs and the data obtained, the general diagnosis of the post-test places the tenth-grade students, parallel "A" in the following level: 13% have a low level, a medium level corresponding to 25%, and 62% of the students with an excellent level, all this regarding to the differentiation between the voiced and unvoiced phoneme "th".

This shows positive and significant results with regard to the first results obtained in the pre-test, where almost half of the students were at a low level, 35% of the population at a medium level, and 24% of the students at an excellent level, this last result being tripled after having applied

our didactic strategy using the "minimal pairs", placing more than half of the students at an excellent level.

All these collected data verify what at the beginning of the research was established as research hypothesis, that...if a didactic strategy was applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" would be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre".

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Scientific hypothesis: If a didactic strategy is applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" will be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school.

Statistical hypothesis:

H0: If a didactic strategy is applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" WILL NOT be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school.

H1: If a didactic strategy is applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" WILL be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school.

Thus, the following formula was used to determine the chi-square statistic value:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

χ^2 : Estadístico Chi cuadrado.
 O_i : frecuencias observadas.
 E_i : frecuencias esperadas.
 $E_i = \frac{n_i \cdot n_j}{n}$

Illustration 11. Chi-square. Elaborated by the authors.

Degree of freedom:

$$DF = (r-1) (c-1) = 2$$

Error range: 5% = 0,05

4.3.1 Scale of students' values in the Pre-Test and Post-Test

Instruments	Excellent comprehension	Medium comprehension	Low comprehension	Total
Pre-test	9	12	15	36
Post-test	22	9	5	36

. Table 3. Scale of students' values in the Pre-test and Post-test. Elaborated by the authors.

4.3.2 Chi- squared calculator (X^2)

Observed frequencies.

Observed	Excellent comprehension	Medium comprehension	Low comprehension	Total
Pre-test	9	12	15	36
Post-test	22	9	5	36
Total	31	21	20	72

Table 4. Observed frequencies. Elaborated by the authors.

Expected frequencies

Expected	Excellent comprehension	Medium comprehension	Low comprehension	Total
Pre-test	$31 \cdot 36 / 72 = 15.5$	$21 \cdot 36 / 72 = 10.5$	$20 \cdot 36 / 72 = 10$	36
Post-test	$31 \cdot 36 / 72 = 15.5$	$21 \cdot 36 / 72 = 10.5$	$20 \cdot 36 / 72 = 10$	36
Total	31	21	20	72

Table 5. Expected frequencies. Elaborated by the authors.

Chi-squared (X^2)

Chi-squared	Excellent comprehension	Medium comprehension	Low comprehension
Pre-test	2,725	0,214	2,5

Post-test	2,725	0,214	2,5
Total (X²)	10,878		

Table 6. Chi-squared. Elaborated by the authors.

4.3.3 Hypothesis testing

Chi-squared	Critical value
10,878	5,99

Table 7. Hypothesis testing. Elaborated by the authors.

Once it is observed that the statistical value obtained from the chi-square is greater (>) than the critical value from the calculated results. Based on the rule, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted. This means that, if a didactic strategy is applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" will be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school.

4.4 Analysis and results discussion

This section is intended to relate and analyze the data obtained in a diagnostic test carried out at the beginning of the research, with the latest data collected through a post-test given to tenth-grade students, parallel "A", after the application of the didactic strategy. As initial results, it was found that the study population had difficulties in the general differentiation of the phoneme "th", as well as the lack of a didactic strategy that would facilitate the understanding of the variants of the phoneme mentioned before, where the greatest deficiencies were reflected in the indicators of stress and phonological listening comprehension.

By applying a didactic strategy based on the use of "minimal pairs", it was possible to obtain evident results regarding to the initial data, positively highlighting an improvement in the indicators that previously had more mistakes, thus, achieving greater success in the phonological

listening comprehension and rhythm indicators, placing a greater number of students in the excellence rubric with respect to the last-mentioned indicator.

Therefore, the activities carried out with the students allowed to create an improvement in listening and speaking skills, through the use of "minimal pairs", which contributed significantly to the intervention proposal. Such activities as "listening discrimination" and "production and pronunciation" motivated the students through dynamic exercises to internalize the language and particularly the pronunciation of the phoneme "th" that composes it.

The application of a didactic strategy within a classroom environment is of vital importance for its positive effects in guiding students' learning, in a dynamic and systematized way, to achieve the purposes set up during the pedagogical process.

The chapter in general described the didactic strategy applied, as well as the results obtained through a chi-square test analysis, which emphasized that, if a didactic strategy is applied using "minimal pairs" as a method, the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" will be achieved in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the "9 de Octubre" high school.

Conclusions

- Through the concepts reviewed by means of bibliographical review, the theoretical research allowed understanding that the practice of phoneme differentiation is important, because it allows students to have a much clearer and accurate pronunciation of the English language, by developing relevant factors such as accentuation, rhythm and intonation, giving a more native accent to the speaker.
- Establishing a previous diagnosis of the level of pronunciation and phonological awareness made it possible to determine the insufficient state in which the tenth-grade students, parallel "A" were in regarding to the phoneme "th", where being little exposed to phonological differentiation as well as not maintaining a didactic strategy for its development, generated persistent errors in the pronunciation and identification of words that were composed of the phoneme studied.
- The development of a didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs" attempted to guide and strengthen, in a systematized way, the differentiation of the variations of the phoneme "th", through interactive and dynamic activities that improved listening comprehension and produced, along with the development of listening and speaking skills, the acquisition of knowledge in an active way by the students.
- The results achieved in the post-test after implementing the didactic strategy through the use of "minimal pairs", revealed positive changes in tenth-grade students, parallel "A" of the high school "9 de Octubre", by placing more than half of the total study population in an excellent level, where in a previous test, almost the same amount, were located in a low level, all this with respect to the identification of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th".

Recommendations

- It is suggested that English teachers encourage in other courses the differentiation of the voiced and unvoiced consonantal phoneme "th" through the use of "minimal pairs", by using didactic resources, to promote students to learn and practice the production of phonemes, as well as to generate a competent development in the sub-skill "pronunciation".
- It is considered that during the development of each class, teachers should generate comfortable environments that motivate students to maintain continuous learning regarding to the differentiation and identification of new phonemes that compose this second language.

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Annexes

Annex 1

Observation guide

Guía de observación			
Asignatura: Inglés			
Observadores: Agila Steven Castro Yuliana		Institución educativa: Colegio de Bachillerato “09 de Octubre”	
Población: 36 estudiantes 10mo grado, paralelo “A”		Fecha de aplicación: 27-07-2023	
Acciones a evaluar	Sí	No	Observaciones
Conoce las variaciones sorda y sonora que tiene el fonema “ <i>th</i> ”			
Mantiene una práctica activa en la producción de sonidos o fonemas del idioma.			
Se comete errores al pronunciar el fonema consonántico sordo y sonoro “ <i>th</i> ”			
Se emplean recursos y estrategias didácticas que permitan espacios de concientización fonológica.			

Annex 2

Pre-Test

Evaluación de conocimiento general sobre el fonema

Pronunciation

1. Lee, repite las siguientes palabras y escoge cuál es la correcta codificación según el orden en que cada tipo de fonema está siendo pronunciado:

1- SORDO

2- SONORO

a. *Brother, other, healthy*

a) 2,2,1

b) 1,1,2

c) 1,2,1

b. *Nothing, mother, something*

a) 2,2,1

b) 1,1,2

c) 1,2,1

c. *Math, tooth, the*

a) 2,2,1

b) 1,1,2

c) 1,2,1

Listening

Escucha el siguiente audio y responde:

2. ¿Cuál de las siguientes palabras contiene el fonema SONORO "th"?

a) Opción 1: *thank you*

b) Opción 2: *there*

c) Opción 3: *think*

3. ¿Cuál de las siguientes palabras contiene el fonema SORDO "th"?

- a) Opción 1: *that*
- b) Opción 2: *smooth*
- c) Opción 3: *mouth*

Annex 3

Week 1 / Class 1



Week 2 / Class 2



Week 3 / Class 3



Annex 4

Post-Test

1. El fonema “th” tiene DOS variaciones, fonema sordo y sonoro: ¿Conoces la diferencia entre el fonema sonoro y sordo “th”?

- a) Sí
- b) No

¿Cuál es?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Escucha el siguiente audio y escoge la codificación correcta según el orden en que cada tipo de fonema está siendo pronunciado:

3- SORDO 2 - SONORO

Nothing, bother, throat

- d) 2,2,1
- e) 1,1,2
- f) 1,2,1

Third, those, thank

- d) 2,2,1
- e) 1,1,2
- f) 1,2,1

Therapy, thought, their

d) 2,2,1

e) 1,1,2

f) 1,2,1

3. Escucha el siguiente audio y responde:

¿Cuál de las siguientes palabras contiene el fonema SONORO "th"?

a) Opción 1: *earth*

b) Opción 2: *therefore*

c) Opción 3: *mouth*

¿Cuál de las siguientes palabras contiene el fonema SORDO "th"?

a) Opción 1: *weather*

b) Opción 2: *therefore*

c) Opción 3: *Thursday*