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*Institute of Literature and Languages*  
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*Branch: English*

## **Investigating the Suitability of Content Gradation in Learning Vowel Pronunciation**

*Case Study of Third Year Middle School Pupils*

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of the Master Degree in  
**Didactics of Foreign Languages**

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### *Dedications*

*With great love and appreciation, I want to express my gratitude to my dear kind **parents**  
to whom I have the pleasure to belong.*



*To all my, sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews for love and support.*



*To the blessing of my life, my **beloved husband**, I stand speechless to thank you for  
all what you have done. I feel lucky to have you.*



*To those candles that consume themselves to light the way for others.*

*The stars that are shining hope in the darkness;*

*Drawing paths towards a great life..... Opening doors on better future.*

*Inspiring dreams, igniting imagination and building confidence.*

*To those who take hands, open minds and touch hearts.*

*The ones who have big hearts to teach little minds.*

*To me and all the teachers in the world, I dedicate this work.*

*I am a teacher and I am proud of being.*

*Nedjwa*

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### **Abstract**

Developing an overall communicative competence in the target language requires enhancing the learners' proficiency in oral performance as well as a high level of intelligible pronunciation. Due to this vital role, pronunciation is included in almost all the educational curricula. The aim of the study is to investigate the suitability of content gradation in learning vowel pronunciation. The third year middle school was used as a case study; fifty teachers of English and fifteen pupils were purposively sampled. Out of the problems, deductions were made to formulate three research questions: (1) Do students encounter difficulties in learning English vowels' pronunciation? (2) Is the pronunciation content well selected and graded to meet the pupils' level and needs? (3) Does the content gradation influence the poorness of learners' pronunciation? Initially, this paper demonstrates relevant literature background to reach a clear understanding about such problems and suggest some pedagogical recommendations. In addition, dominant theories related to content selection and gradation are exposed. The review of literature shows the influential role content plays in the smoothness and effectiveness of the learning process, if it is well selected and graded to meet the pupils' level and needs. In an attempt to find answers to the research questions, a descriptive method is opted for and two instruments are used, namely a teachers' questionnaire and a classroom observation. The information gathered from the empirical survey generally reveal that inappropriate content selection and gradation weakens the level of the pupils in pronunciation. In particular, the current syllabus failed to provide the third year pupils with the necessary vowel sounds in a well-selected and graded design.

**Key words:** pronunciation, vowels, content selection, content gradation, suitability.

### **List of Abbreviations**

**AMEP:** Adult Migrant English Program

**CBA:** Competency-Based Approach

**ELT:** English Language Teaching

**ENS:** Ecole Normale Superieure

**EFL:** English as Foreign Language

**ESP:** English for Specific Purposes

**ESL:** English as Second Language

**IPA:** International Phonetics Alphabet

**L2:** Second Language

**TBS:** Task Based Syllabuses

**3 Ps:** Presentation, Practice and Production

**%:** Percentage

### **List of Figures**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Fig 1.1: Human Vocal Organs and Points of Articulation ( Ladefoged, 2014)..... | 19 |
| Fig 1.2: Place and Manner of Articulation (Yule, 2010, p. 27) .....            | 20 |
| Fig 1.3: English diphthongs (Roach, 2009, p. 17).....                          | 23 |

### **Lists of Graphs**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Graph 2.01: Participants Academic Degree.....   | 46 |
| Graph 2.02: Participants' Teaching Experience.....                                      | 47 |
| Graph 2.03: Third Middle School Teaching Experience.....                                | 47 |
| Graph 2.04: Importance of Pronunciation to Third Year Middle School Pupils.....         | 48 |
| Graph 2.05: Arguments for Teaching Pronunciation.....                                   | 49 |
| Graph 2.06: Difficulty of Teaching Pronunciation to Middle School Pupils.....           | 50 |
| Graph 2.07: Most Difficult Pronunciation Aspects.....                                   | 50 |
| Graph 2.08: Pupils' Pronunciation Level.....  | 51 |
| Graph 2.09: Difficulty of Learning Pronunciation.....                                   | 52 |
| Graph 2.10: Reasons of Pronunciation Learning Difficulty.....                           | 52 |
| Graph 2.11: Content Suitability to Third Year Pupils.....                               | 53 |
| Graph 2.12: Content Coverage of the Necessary Pronunciation Features.....               | 54 |
| Graph 2.13: Sufficiency of the Pronunciation Lessons .....                              | 54 |
| Graph 2.15: Correspondence of Vowel Sounds in Pronunciation Lessons .....               | 55 |
| Graph 2.16: Suitability of Pronunciation Content Gradation to Pupils' Needs .....       | 56 |
| Graph 2.17: Increase of Presented Pronunciation Features in Difficulty.....             | 57 |
| Graph 2.18: Appropriateness of Pronunciation Content Gradation for 3rdYear Pupils ..... | 58 |
| Graph 2.19: Effect of Inappropriate Content Gradation on the Pupils' Level .....        | 58 |



## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Title Page.....</b>                                | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Dedications.....</b>                               | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgment.....</b>                            | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Abstract.....</b>                                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>                     | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>List of Figures.....</b>                           | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>List of Graphs.....</b>                            | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Table of Contents.....</b>                         | <b>8</b>  |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>The General Introduction.....</b>                  | <b>11</b> |
| 1. Statement of the Problem.....                      | 11        |
| 2. The Research Aim .....                             | 12        |
| 3. The Research Questions.....                        | 12        |
| 4. Research Methodology.....                          | 12        |
| 5. The Research Structure.....                        | 12        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>Chapter One: Review of Related Literature.....</b> | <b>13</b> |
| Introduction.....                                     | 13        |
| <b>1.1. Section One: Pronunciation.....</b>           | <b>13</b> |
| 1.1.1. Definition.....                                | 13        |
| 1.1.2. The Importance of Pronunciation .....          | 14        |
| 1.1.3. Phonetics and Phonology .....                  | 15        |
| 1.1.3.1 Phonetics.....                                | 15        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1.1.3.2. Phonology.....   | 15        |
| 1.1.4. Aspects of Pronunciation .....                                   | 16        |
| 1.1.4.1. Segmental Features .....                                       | 16        |
| a. English Consonants .....   | 17        |
| b. English Vowels.....  | 21        |
| 1.1.4.2. Suprasegmental features.....                                   | 24        |
| 1.1.5. English Pronunciation Teaching.....                              | 26        |
| 1.1.5.1. Status of Pronunciation in Teaching Language Approaches... ..  | 26        |
| 1.1.5.2. Strategies to Teach Vowel Pronunciation in English.....        | 27        |
| <b>Section Two: Content Selection and Gradation.....</b>                | <b>29</b> |
| Introduction.....   | 29        |
| 1.2.1 Content Definition .....  | 29        |
| 1.2.2. Syllabus Definition .....  | 29        |
| 1.2.3. Content Selection.....   | 31        |
| 1.2.3.1. Criteria for Content Selection.....                            | 33        |
| 1.2.3.2. Factors for Specifying Course Content .....                    | 35        |
| 1.2.4. Content Gradation .....  | 36        |
| 1. 2.4.1. Criteria for Content Sequencing .....                         | 37        |
| 1.2.4.2. Criteria for Grading Content .....                             | 37        |
| 1.2.5. Content Selection and Gradation within Different Syllabuses..... | 39        |
| 1.2.5.1. Grammatical/ Structural Syllabus.....                          | 39        |
| 1.2.5.2. Functional-Notional Syllabus.....                              | 39        |
| 1.2.5.3. The Procedural Syllabus.....                                   | 40        |
| 1.2.5.4. Content-Based Syllabus.....                                    | 41        |
| 1.2.5.5. Task/ Task-Based Syllabus.....                                 | 42        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1.2.6. Status of Pronunciation in Foreign Language Course Content..... | 43        |
| 1.2.7. Algerian Educational System.....                                | 43        |
| Conclusion.....  | 44        |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: The Field Work.....</b>                                | <b>45</b> |
| Introduction.....  | 45        |
| <b>2.1. Section One: Teachers' Questionnaire.....</b>                  | <b>45</b> |
| 2.1.1. Administration of the Teachers' Questionnaire.....              | 45        |
| 2.1.2. Description of the Questionnaire.....                           | 45        |
| 2.1.3. Analysis of the Questionnaire.....                              | 46        |
| 2.1.4. Discussion of Results.....                                      | 60        |
| <b>2.2. Section Two: Classroom Observation.....</b>                    | <b>61</b> |
| 2.2.1. Population and Sample .....                                     | 61        |
| 2.2.2. Implementation.....   | 61        |
| 2.2.3. Observation Description.....                                    | 62        |
| 2.2.4. Results of Classroom Observation.....                           | 64        |
| 2.2.5. Discussion of Results.....                                      | 69        |
| Conclusion.....  | 70        |
| Recommendations.....   | 71        |
| Limitations of Study .....   | 72        |
| General Conclusion .....   | 73        |
| References.....  | 74        |
| Appendices.  |           |
| الملخص   |           |
| Resume   |           |

## **General Introduction**

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

Today, English is the most widely used language in the world. It has gained its dominance due to the technological and economic development of the native language speaking countries. For that reason, English language is taught in most countries as a second or foreign language and Algeria is not an exception.

Since teaching English in Algeria as a foreign language aims basically at achieving educational objectives as well as socio-cultural ones, developing basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing is strongly required. Besides, a high level of oral performance must be reached. Yet many learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher (Morley, 1994; Fraser 2000, as cited in Adult Migrant English Program [AMEP], 2002). Therefore, greater appreciation should be devoted to pronunciation as it is said to be one of the fundamental factors in achieving the desired mutual intelligibility. Nevertheless, pronunciation remains a seriously neglected part of English Language Teaching (ELT), both in research and in classroom practice.

Algerian teachers are facing serious problems in teaching pronunciation due to various causes. The most prominent one is that of delivering the content provided in the official syllabus to their pupils, though in our country, the difficulty lies in content gradation especially in case of vowels. Thus, the present research seeks to investigate the content suitability to pupils in terms of selection and gradation in an attempt to shed the light on such influential issue.

### **2. The Research Aim**

In the light of previously mentioned points, the main purpose of conducting this research is to investigate to what extent the gradation of the vowel pronunciation content

presented in the third year middle school is suitable to the pupils. In addition, it is hoped to raise educational and pedagogical awareness of people who are in charge of syllabus design towards the issue of content selection and gradation.

### **3. Research Questions**

The present study will seek answers to the following questions:

- Do students encounter difficulties in learning English vowels' pronunciation?
- Is the pronunciation content well selected and graded to meet pupils' level and needs?
- Does the content gradation influence the poorness of learners' pronunciation?

### **4. Research Methodology**

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions and fulfill the aim of this study, two descriptive research methods were used in order to obtain the data needed for the completion of this work.

First, the questionnaire, which is addressed to 50 middle school teachers, is designed to detect their views about the vowel sounds gradation and its suitability to the pupils. Second, the observation is a complementary research tool to help us gain more accurate information about this issue and it is hoped to confirm the questionnaire findings.

### **5. Research Structure**

The present study comprises two main chapters, a theoretical and a practical one. The theoretical chapter is made up of two main sections; the first one exposes the relevant theoretical background about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching while the second section is wholly devoted to issues related to content selection and gradation. The practical part, on the other hand, will display the data collected by the research tools and interpret them. This piece of work will end up with recommendations for further studies and limitation of the study.

## CHAPTER ONE: Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

Because of their natural need to communicate with the others, humans use a sound system to transfer information, convey messages and express their thoughts. Pronunciation, as the use of this sound system in speaking, is so basic to language and has to be considered in any teaching-learning process.

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical background relevant to the research topic. It consists of a summation of previous studies and theories that support the current study. The first section of this chapter makes explicit those theoretical ideas related to the general concept of pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. While Section Two shifts the focus of attention on the topic of content selection and gradation.

### 1.1 Section one: Pronunciation

#### *1.1.1. Definition*

Pronunciation is defined, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, as the way in which a language or a particular word or sound is spoken as the way in which a language or a particular word or sound is spoken (Wehmeier, 2005). In this brief definition, pronunciation is merely treated as the act of producing sounds or words. For Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), "Pronunciation is the production of significant sound used by a particular language as part of the code of the language, and used to achieve meaning in context" (p. 3). Based on their definition, pronunciation is the production of significant sound in two senses. First, sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a specific language. In this sense, pronunciation is seen as a mere production and reception of speech sound. Second, it deals with pronunciation in reference to acts of speaking. Sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in contexts. Therefore, we can define pronunciation as a part of the

speaking skill that is featured by making correct sounds of a particular language, as well as how these sounds are put together in the flow of speech in order to achieve meaningful use (Kristina, Diah, & ZitaRarasteja, 2006, as cited in Yanti, 2020). In this vein, Zawadzki (1994, as cited in AMEP Research Centre, 2002) added that besides sounds of a language (segments), pronunciation includes attention to the aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound, such as intonation, stress, timing, rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), how the voiced is projected (voiced quality) and in its broadest definition, attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language.

### ***1.1.2. Importance of Pronunciation***

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of oral communication which involves not only making correct sounds, but rather the words being pronounced should be understandable. A necessary part of intelligible pronunciation in English also considers knowing how to stress words correctly and how to use intonation appropriately because every sound, stress pattern, and intonation may convey meaning.

In oral interaction, there is a mutual comprehensive relationship between the speaker and the listener and they may affect each other. It means that in order to enable the listener comprehend the meaning of what is said, the speaker has to speak clearly and this involves a clear pronunciation. For this reason, pronunciation is one of the important aspects of language to be learned. If the students speak with incorrect pronunciation, it can make misunderstanding in meaning because speech sounds, in a language, are distinctive units since different sounds can lead to different meanings (Yule, 2010). Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) stressed the importance of pronunciation in learning as well. They have argued that the purpose of teaching pronunciation is not to help learners be native-like, but rather help them produce meaningful and intelligible utterances. Besides, phonetic ability, identity, motivation and this for sure has great influence on pronunciation teaching.

### ***1.1.3. Phonetics and Phonology***

There are two sub-disciplines in linguistics which deal with studying language sounds, namely phonetics and phonology.

**1.1.3.1. Phonetics.** Linguists have promoted various definitions of the term phonetics. However, what is commonly agreed upon is its essence as the study of full range of human beings' vocal sounds. Kelly (2000) indicated that the term can be used to mean the study of speech sounds which consists of a number of branches, namely physiological phonetics, articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetics, auditory phonetics and perceptual phonetics.

In the same line, McMahan (2002) stated that phonetics provides objective ways of describing and analyzing the range of sounds humans use in their languages. Added to this, Kreidler (2004) pointed out that phonetics deals with the articulatory aspects of speech, how sounds are produced by the organs, and the acoustic aspect is concerned with how sounds get transmitted through waves and how they affect the reception of those sounds by the hearer.

**1.1.3.2. Phonology.** Phonology is defined by Kelly (2000) as the study of systems of sounds within a specific language. He added that it deals with the segmental and the suprasegmental features of language. Phonology, in a most inclusive sense, is one of the branches of linguistics that studies how sounds occur together with other sound in a certain language. Moreover, Ladefoged (2001) added that "Phonology involves studying a language to determine its distinctive sounds and to find out which sounds convey a difference in meaning" (p.23).

Basically, it is the description of the systems and patterns of speech sounds in a language concerning with the abstract or mental aspect instead of actual physical articulation of speech sound (Yule, 2010). Besides, phonology is concerned with the range and function of sounds in specific languages and with the rules which can be written to show the types of phonetic relationships that relate and contrast words and other linguistic units (Crystal, 2008).



In brief, we can, on the basis of the cited definitions, come to the conclusion that both phonetics and phonology are correlated with the study of speech. However, phonetics deals with measurable, physical properties of speech sounds themselves, i.e. how the mouth produces certain sounds, and the characteristics of the resulting soundwaves; while phonology is concerned with how sounds of a given language or a set of different languages are organized into a system and it broadly investigates the mental system for representing and processing speech sounds within particular language (Kirchner, n.d.). Furthermore, it is interested in the description of pronunciation, its communicative possibility, what leads to differentiation of utterances, and how different sounds convey different meanings. According to McMahon (2002), the relationship between phonetics and phonology is a complex one, but we might initially approach phonology as narrowed-down phonetics.

#### ***1.1.4. Aspects of Pronunciation***

To achieve intelligibility, segmental and suprasegmental features should be considered.

**1.1.4. 1. Segmental Features of Pronunciation.** The segmental feature concerns with the phonemes which include vowels and consonants of a language. According to Crystal (2008), “A phoneme is the minimal unit in the sound system of a language”( p.36). It is the smallest sound unit of any language that makes different ways of pronunciation. That is to say, if two words have at least two different phonemes, they are necessarily pronounced differently. For example, the words *pen* and *pet*—differ in their last phonemes /n/ and /t/, whereas the words *lend* and *land* differ in their second phonemes /e/ and /a / Roach(2009). The total number of the English language phonemes is 44: 20 vowels and 24 consonants.

## a- English Consonants

Crystal (2008) defined consonants in terms of both phonetics and phonology. Phonetically, it is a speech sound that is articulated with complete or partial closure in the vocal track, so the airflow is either completely blocked or restricted that audible friction is produced. Phonologically, consonants are those units which function at the margins of syllables, either singly or in clusters. There are 24 consonant sounds in the English language and are produced by 21 letters of regular English alphabets. The 24 consonants are: /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /z/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /l/, /r/, /h/, /w/, and /j/.

To classify the consonant sounds, three types of information are needed; voicing, Place of Articulation and Manner of Articulation.

### ➤ Voicing

The first criterion used to classify consonant phonemes is to determine whether the consonants are voiced or voiceless? According to Yule (2010), the vocal cords, take two basic positions:

According to Crystal (2008), when producing a voiced consonant, there is a vibration on the Adam's apple such as /z/ and /v/. However, when there is no vibration in the vocal cords, the produced sounds in this way are described as voiceless like the /t/ and /θ/.

### ➤ Place of Articulation

The second criterion is to know the portion of the vocal tract where the airflow is interrupted. This is known as the place of articulation.

Regarding the place of articulation, Yule (2010) classified consonants into categories. These are places of articulation.

- **Bilabials**

A bilabial is a sound that is produced with both lips. In this position, the vocal tract is interrupted at lips by pressing the two against each other, then release the sounds. The English *bilabials* are /p/, /b/ and /m/.

- **Labiodentals**

Labiodental sounds can be made with the upper teeth against either the inside surface of the lip (endolabial) or the outside edge of the **lower** lip (exolabial). The consonants which are categorized *labiodental* are /f/ and /v/.

- **Interdental**

In *dental* consonants, the tip of the tongue touches the upper front teeth or is placed just behind the teeth and the airflow is interrupted to produce a specific sound like /θ/ and /ð/.

- **Alveolar**

When the front part of the tongue is pressed with the tooth ridge, the place of articulation is **alveolar**. The consonants which are categorized *alveolars* are /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /n/, /l/ and /r/.

- **Palatals**

Palatals are produced by placing the tongue at the very front of the palate, which is near the alveolar ridge. The English *palatals* are /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/ and /j/.

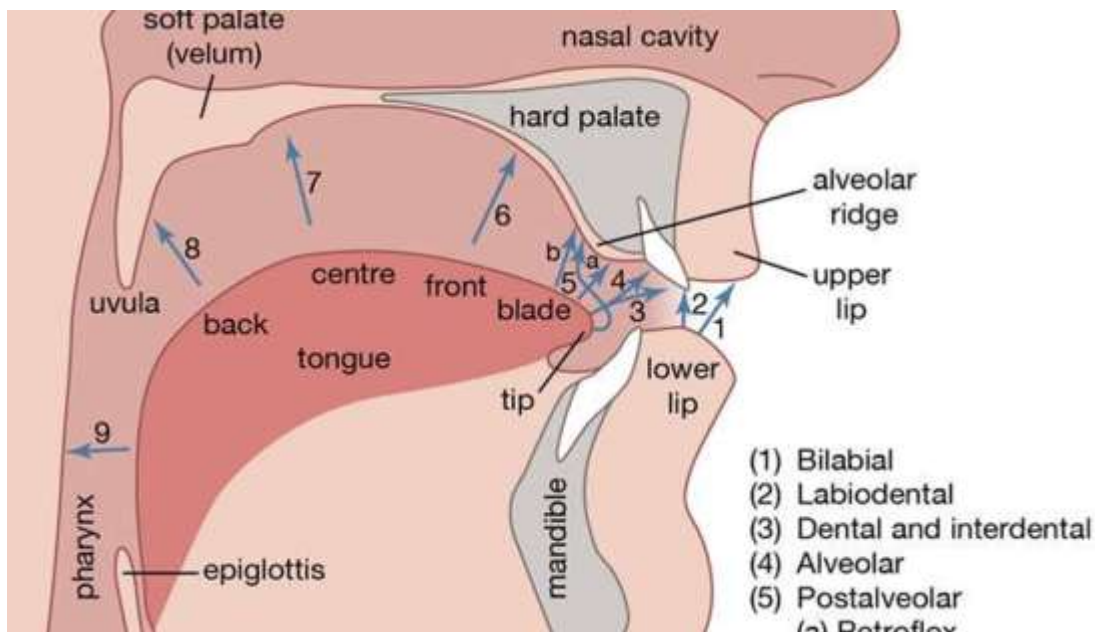
- **Velar**

By rising the back of the tongue (dorsum) to touch the soft palate (velum), consonant sounds /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/ are produced. The place of articulation is classified as *velar*.

- **Glottal**

/h/ is the only glottal sound which is made without the tongue and other parts of the mouth. It is produced in the glottis; a space between the vocal cords and the larynx.

The following chart summarizes what have been explained above concerning consonants.



**Fig 1.1: Human Vocal Organs and Points of Articulation (Ladefoged, 2014)**

### ➤ Manner of Articulation

The third criterion is the way in which the vocal tract is obstructed. These terms are discussed in details under the subject of articulatory phonetics.

- **Stop** sounds are also called **Plosives**. O'Connor (1998) noted that

In stop consonants the breath is completely stopped at some point in the mouth by lips, teeth, or tongue-tip or of the tongue-back, and then released with a slight explosion. There are three pairs of phonemes containing the sounds stops /p, b/, /t, d/ and /k, g/. (p.39)

- If the airflow is blocked by the mouth but the air is permitted to flow through the nasal cavity, the consonant sounds are called **Nasals**. In English, /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ generate nasal sounds. Sometimes these are also termed **nasal stops**.

- It is also possible to not block the airflow completely but allow the air to pass turbulently through the small space in articulators. This type of consonant sounds is called **Fricatives**. /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, and /h/ are the English fricatives.
- Similarly, when the air flows smoothly through closely spaced articulators, the resulting sound is called **Approximant**. /j/ and /w/ are approximants.
- The sound /r/ is called **Trill**. It involves the rapid vibrations of articulators by narrowing down the gap between them.
- **Affricates** are the consonant sounds that combine the features of plosives and fricatives. /tʃ/, /dʒ/ are the English affricates.
- While saying the word 'like', the tip of tongue touches the alveolar ridge or upper teeth. The air flows from the open sides of the tongue instead of stopping completely. Such sounds are called **Laterals**.

**PVM Chart: English**

|           |            |           |             | PLACE  |          |              |         |       |         |   |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|---------|-------|---------|---|
|           |            |           |             | LABIAL |          | CORONAL      |         |       | DORSAL  |   |
| MANNER    | VOICING    | Bilabial  | Labiodental | Dental | Alveolar | Postalveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |   |
|           | OBSTRUENTS | Stop      | Voiceless   | p      |          |              | t       |       |         | k |
| Voiced    |            |           | b           |        |          | d            |         |       | g       |   |
| Fricative |            | Voiceless |             | f      | θ        | s            | ʃ       |       |         | h |
|           |            | Voiced    |             | v      | ð        | z            | ʒ       |       |         |   |
| Affricate |            | Voiceless |             |        |          |              | tʃ      |       |         |   |
|           |            | Voiced    |             |        |          |              | dʒ      |       |         |   |
| SONORANTS | Nasal      | Voiced    | m           |        |          | n            |         |       | ŋ       |   |
|           | LIQUID     | Lateral   | Voiced      |        |          |              | l       |       |         |   |
|           |            | Rhotic    | Voiced      |        |          |              |         | r     |         |   |
|           | Glide      | Voiced    | w           |        |          |              |         | j     | w       |   |

**Fig.1. 2: Place and Manner of Articulation (Yule, 2010, p. 27)**

## **b- English Vowels**

Even though all the languages of the world contain both vowels and consonants, it is necessary to consider the way in which vowels differ from consonants. A vowel is defined as a voiced sound produced without obstruction of the flow of air in the mouth that are unaccompanied by any friction noise (Jones, 1978). Basically, a vowel sound is pronounced with the mouth open and allows the air to flow freely through it from the lungs. In the production of all the vowels, the velum is raised constraining the air to pass through the oral cavity. Accordingly, vowels can be described as oral sounds.

Odgen (2009) distinguished vowels and consonants stating that the vowels play a central role in syllables because words containing no consonants may be founded, like awe /ɔ:/ but never find a word with no vowel.

English vowels can be divided into two major categories: simple vowels (also called pure vowels or monophthongs) and diphthongs (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). In addition, Roach (2009) referred to triphthongs as the third category of vowels. In English, there are twelve pure vowels, eight diphthongs and five triphthongs.

### ➤ **Pure Vowels**

Roach (2009), stated that: “A vowel which remains constant and does not glide is called a pure vowel” (p.21). Vowel sounds are classified and described on the basis of the following variables:

- **Tongue Position**

When describing vowels in terms of tongue position, two criteria should be taken into consideration: the height (how high is the tongue) and the part of the tongue involved in the production of the sound.

In English, the most important aspect is the height of the tongue. Depending on the language, several tongue heights are possible. English has three heights: **high**, **mid** and **low**.

- When the tongue is close to the roof of the mouth, it is **high**, as in /ɪ/, /i:/, /ʊ/ and /u:/.
- The tongue position can be **mid (intermediate)**, as in /ə/, /e/, and /ɔ:/.
- When the tongue is **low** in the mouth, as in /æ/ or /a:/; the vowel is also described as ‘low’

Vowels can also be classified according to the part of the tongue involved in the production:

- **Front** The front vowels are produced when the front part of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate and they are /ɪ, i:, e, æ /.
- **Back:** When the back part of the tongue is the highest point. These are the back vowels the English sound inventory possesses: /ɒ, ʊ, ɑ:, ɔ:, u:/.
- There are also vowels in between called **central**, namely, /ə/, /ɜ:/ and /ɔ:/.

- **Length**

It is important to study the time dimension as it affects speech in many ways (Roach, 2011). Length is the term sometimes used in phonetics to refer to a subjective impression about measurable duration. Some languages have phonemic differences between sounds regarding length, and English is claimed by some writers to be of this type (Roach, 2011). There are, as mentioned before, twelve pure vowels in English classified into seven **short** vowels /ə, e, æ, ʌ, ɪ, ʊ, ɒ/ and five **long** vowels /ɔ:, u:, i:, ɑ:, ɜ:/.

- **Lip Position**

In addition to the tongue position, the lip position is important in the articulation of vowels. Vowels may also be different from each other with respect to rounding. The main types of lip position are introduced by Roach (2009) as follows:

**Rounded:** the lip corners are pushed forwards and their shape is similar to a circle during the production of the vowel sounds /ɒ, u:, ɔ:, ʊ/.

**Spread:** the lip corners are separated from each other to give them a smile-like shape during the production of the vowel sounds /i:, ɪ/.

**Neutral:** the lip shape is difficult to be distinguished whether it is spread or rounded during the production of the sounds /ə, ʌ, ɑː, æ/.

### ➤ Diphthongs

English also has vowels that are a sequence of two vowels. These are called diphthongs. According to Jones (1978), diphthongs are another branch of vowel. The most important feature in diphthongs is that of gliding from one position of vowel to another. As they are made up of two vowels and heard as one phoneme, opinions differ whether these should be treated as phonemes in their own right, or as combinations of two phonemes. However, the most common diphthongs are transcribed in International Phonetics Alphabet [IPA] with two vowel symbols (Kirchner, n.d).

There are eight English diphthongs. English diphthongs which are divided into two groups, depending on the movement of the tongue. The **central** diphthongs end with a glide towards the vowel in the center of the mouth, and they are /ɪə, eə, ʊə/. The second group, **closing** diphthongs, end with a glide towards higher position in the mouth, and they are /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ, aʊ/ (Roach, 2009).



**Fig 1.2: English diphthongs (Roach, 2009, p. 17)**



### ➤ **Triphthongs**

Triphthongs, as the combination of three short vowels in one impulse of breath, are the most complex sounds in English because they can be difficult to pronounce and recognize as well. Roach (2009) pointed out that “Triphthongs are a glide from one vowel to another to a third, all produced rapidly and without interruption” (p.24). The five English Triphthongs are formed by adding ə to the closing diphthongs /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ, aʊ / to get the following triphthongs: /eɪə, aɪə, ɔɪə, əʊə, aʊə/(Roach, 2011).

**1.1.4.2. Suprasegmental Features.** Many significant sound contrasts are not the result of differences between phonemes. There are contrasts which extend over segments (phonemes), these are called Suprasegmental features (Roach, 2009).

**Stress:** In English, stress is defined as the strength of voice placed on a particular syllable in a particular word. Stress can fall on the first, middle or last syllable and it gives it a kind of prominence resulting from increased loudness, length or sound quality. However, in the theory of pronunciation, it is not only words that may be stressed. Stress can also occur in word groups or phrases and in sentences, and basically it falls on the parts, which are considered as the most important ones. Ladefoged (2001) has pointed out that:

Stress is a suprasegmental feature of utterances. It applies not to individual vowels and consonants but to whole syllables whatever they might be. A stressed syllable is pronounced with a greater amount of energy than an unstressed syllable, and it is more prominent in the flow of speech. (p.231)

Many factors affect the stress placement; the nature of the word, its grammatical category (verb, noun or adjective), the number of syllables in the word and if it contains a prefix or a suffix (Guion, Clark, &Wayland, 2003).

- ❖ **Pitch** is an auditory sensation related to the frequency of the vibration of the vocal cords. It is used in many languages as an essential component of the pronunciation of a word. So, a change of pitch may cause a change in meaning: these are called tone languages where pitch plays a central role in intonation. Pitch is generally divided into four types; **low** pitch, **normal** pitch, **high** pitch, and **extra** pitch. Pitch level varies in a way that it depends on the situation and what word is needed to emphasize (Miryani, n. d).
  - ❖ **Intonation** While pitch refers to the degree of high or low tone on a syllable, intonation is the flow, the going up and down of pitch over different syllables in an utterance (Miryani, n.d). According to (Kelly, 2000), “It is the changes in the music of the voice while producing speech”. It is sometimes called the ‘melody of speech’ as it makes sentences more interesting and the speech livelier and not boring. Basically, it is divided into three types: the *falling*, *rising*, and *high normal sustained* intonation. It helps convey emotions, express attitudes and understand the others. (Miryani, n.d)
  - ❖ **Pause** allows the speaker to draw breath, but we pause for a number of other reasons as well like constructing what to say or searching for a word that is difficult to retrieve. It can also be used for dramatic effect at significant points in a speech. From the phonetic point of view, pauses differ in two main ways: one is the length of the pause, and the other is whether the pause is silent or contains a “hesitation noise” (Roach, 2011).
  - ❖ **Juncture:** While pause is the silence between parts of an utterance, juncture is the space between sounds or words found in continuous speech (Roach, 2011).
- Rhythm:** In phonetics, it is the sense of movement in speech, marked by stress, timing, and quantity of syllables (Nordquist, 2019). “English speech has a rhythm that allows us to divide it up into more or less equal intervals of time called feet, each of which begins with a stressed syllable: this is called the stress-timed rhythm hypothesis” (Roach, 2011, p. 76).

### ***1.1.5. English Pronunciation Teaching***

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects in teaching and learning foreign languages. As a result, English pronunciation teaching and learning have been the subjects of interest for many researchers. Subsequently, many methods of teaching and classroom tasks have been designed.

Pronunciation is a prominent aspect in foreign languages; so more importance should be devoted to teaching pronunciation. Gilakajani (2016) concluded that English pronunciation instruction should be viewed in the same light as the other aspects and skills of the English language such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing since it is an important part of communication. Harmer (2007) stated that correct pronunciation is considered as a prerequisite to develop the speaking skill. Therefore, teaching pronunciation should occupy an important place in the study of any language.

In short, features of pronunciation that should be taught for language learners viewed in the same light as the other aspects and skills of the English language such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing since it is an important part of communication.

**1.1.5. 1. Status of Pronunciation in Teaching Language Approaches.** The attention trained on pronunciation in the last three decades is affecting not only the practice of language teaching but also language teaching research and theoretical discussions on language learning and use for communication in an interconnected world (Pennington, 2021). At the present time, although the amount of research on pronunciation teaching is steadily increasing, there is still much more to explore about the effects and effectiveness of different approaches at different stages of learning and levels of proficiency. There are many teaching methods, but the direct method, the naturalistic method, and the audiolingual method have been mentioned as the most common ones in teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

**a-** In the **Direct Method**, pronunciation is taught through intuition and imitation; students imitate a model (teacher or a record) and do their best to approximate it through repetition. Techniques like drilling, listening comprehension exercises and reading exercises are the basis of classroom practice. By using a variety in the pronunciation lessons, students will be more successful at English pronunciation and gain confidence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996 ).

**b- Naturalistic Method:** The Natural Approach was developed by Tracy Terrell, while its later development and articulation have been influenced by the second language acquisition theory. It includes comprehension methods which devote a period of learning solely to listening before any speaking is allowed in order to give learners the opportunity to internalize the target sound system. The teacher speaks only the target language in the classroom while errors are not corrected unless communication is seriously impaired. The teachers utilize realia, pictures, and students' previous knowledge to make their speech comprehensible and their pronunciation good despite they have never received explicit pronunciation instruction (Krashen, 1982).

**c- Audiolingual** (American) and **Oral Approach** (Britain): For this approach, pronunciation is very important and is taught right from the very beginning. The teacher models the sound, and the students are expected to mimic the dialogue and eventually memorize it. Then, this is followed by pattern drill as simple repetition, or substitution. The aim of the drill is to "strengthen habits", and to make the pattern "automatic"(Krashen, 1982, p. 130). Besides, the teacher makes use of information from phonetics, such as visual transcription system (modified IPA or other systems) or charts that demonstrate the articulation of sounds (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

**1.1.5.2: Strategies to Teach Vowel Pronunciation in English.** English pronunciation teaching and learning has been the subject that many researchers are concern

about. Because of that fact, there are various opinions towards teaching techniques and strategies that can be applied through activities ( Busyteacher, n.d.).

❖ **Listen and repeat**

This is the first and most common strategy designed to improve foreign language pronunciation. The teacher utters the target sound and the students repeat it intensively until they are able to pronounce it correctly.

❖ **Isolation**

When working on a specific sound, it may help the students isolate and pronounce it rather than presenting that certain sound as part of a complete word in English. By doing so, the students can say it repeatedly, focusing on the small nuances in the correct pronunciation and also engraining the sound pattern into their minds.

❖ **Minimal pairs**

A minimal pair is two words that vary in only one sound. For example, fill and fell are minimal pairs because only one vowel sound differs between them. Minimal pairs are a great way to focus pronunciation on just one sound. In addition to the pronunciation benefits, the students will also expand their vocabulary.

❖ **Homographs and Homophones**

Using homographs and homophones can provide useful opportunities for students to practise words which have the same spelling but with different pronunciation like wind /wind/ as in weather versus wind /waind/ as in what you do to a clock) or on the contrary, have the same pronunciation but different spellings like there / ðeə/ versus their / ðeə/ and they're /ðeə/.

❖ **Record and replay**

By using a device to record what the students are saying, the teacher has empirical data to play back for each person. In this way, the student can listen to what he actually said. He may also want to compare his recording to that of a native speaker. In this way, the students will have a more objective understanding of their true pronunciation and be able to correct it.

## **Section Two: Content Selection and Gradation**

### ***1.2.1. Content Definition***

Content simply means the totality of what is to be taught in a school system. The content components of a teaching learning situation refer to the important topics, themes, beliefs, behaviours, concepts and facts. These elements are often grouped within each subject or learning area under knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, that are expected to be learned and form the basis of teaching and learning ( International Bureau of Education Council, n.d).

Brumfit (1984) argued that the term *content* is frequently ambiguous in discussions of language teaching; it can refer simultaneously to the items of language that may be selected for the syllabus or curriculum, or to the topics which may be included in reading, writing, or listening and speaking. Besides, language teaching has no obvious content in the sense that history or physics teaching may be said to have.

### ***1.2.2. Syllabus Definition***

Prabhu (1984, as cited in Berardo, 2007) pointed out that “The syllabus is the content or subject matter of individual subject proficiency” (p. 274). It covers the portion of what topics should be taught in a particular subject, more narrowly, it focuses on the selection and the gradation of content. Thus, syllabus refers to that subpart of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught. Moreover, as Breen (1984, as cited in Nunan, 1988) noted, any syllabus can indirectly express certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning, and about the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom.

Broadly speaking, Nunan (1988) and Brumfit (1984, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) defined syllabus as a statement of content, which is used as the basis for planning courses of

various kinds and which leads towards a specific goal, and it is judged by the success or failure of the pupils to achieve these objectives.

It is essential for syllabus design to be seen as an integral part of the global curriculum, therefore, it would be useful to give some indications at the outset of what precedes. It is also worth mentioning that some concepts and procedures are essential to be included in the discussion such as; needs analysis, goal and objective setting, as well as the selecting and grading learning tasks.

*Needs Analysis* is considered a primary stage which helps identify the learners' needs, desires and preferences in addition to identifying their language background, in an attempt to design a successful and effective course. Richard (2001) referred to as "A distinct and necessary phase in planning educational programs" (p. 51). Furthermore, he had the conviction that the process of needs analysis is one of the major assumptions of curriculum development whose aim is to collect a wide range of information about the learners in order to make more accurate decisions in selecting suitable content for the learners. One of the most prominent claims which support needs analysis is that it provides an opportunity for designers to collect data and identify the communication requirements, personal needs, motivations, relevant characteristics, and resources of the learner as Yalden (1983, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) assumed.

In order to provide a rationale for the course or programme and before selecting the appropriate content, identifying learning *goals* is crucial. *Objectives* are the most important step in any planning as they guide and determine the teaching success (Nicholls & Nicholls, 1978, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993). Thus, content Selection cannot be done on any grounds other than its functionality to aims and objectives. As Nunan (1988) noted, it should facilitate learners' progress and take them forward as effectively as possible towards the objective. In the same line, Wheeler (1979, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) stressed the importance of aims

and objectives and that the educator should always go back to his aims and objectives when selecting content.

For Nunan (1988) the term 'goal' refers to the general purposes for which a language programme is being taught or learned. As they are the educative purpose to be reached at the end of a certain time span. Objectives are most helpful when they are expressed in terms of knowledge and skills that can be readily identified and assessed. Thus, no learning can take place without the necessary objectives which need to be stated explicitly at the beginning of the lesson and after an interpretation of the situation analysis has been done. This analysis will indicate many suitable objectives, which will serve as a basis for selection of content, materials and methods (Nicholls & Nicholls, 1978, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993). Added to this, objectives can reflect learners' needs in terms of both language content, skills and communicative abilities.

### ***1. 2.3. Content Selection***

Since language is highly complex and cannot be taught all at once, selection of materials is a must to achieve a successful teaching which depends on prior set objectives, and course conditions (Nunan, 1988). However, in language teaching, two crucial questions have shaped the whole process and occupied the field of English as foreign language [EFL] for decades: What knowledge is truly essential, enduring? And what is worth teaching and learning? The need to make valuable judgements and choices in deciding what to include in (or omit from) and which elements are to be the basic building blocks of the syllabus, presents a constant dilemma and makes the issue of content selection and gradation so problematic on all levels.

The first question to confront the syllabus designer is where the content to come from in the first place and how our beliefs about the nature of language and learning might



influence our decision-making on what to put into the syllabus? (Nunan, 1988). Before getting deeper in discussion, it is noteworthy that since teachers are in a position to provide essential information, they should be consulted on selecting appropriate and valid content to be presented to pupils as part of the teaching-learning situation. Brumfit (1979, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) said in this regard that:

Any process of presentation by the teacher (given that in the limited time available he cannot wait for foreign language to crop up accidentally) must involve him in judgements about selection, and these judgements will only be possible to evaluate if the teacher is aware of categories on which to base the identification of items to be selected. (p. 184)

Nunan (1988) stated that, until fairly recently, lists of grammatical, phonological, and vocabulary items which were then graded according to difficulty and usefulness were the departure point of most syllabus designs. The task for the learner was seen as gaining mastery over these items and language learning, it was assumed, entails building blocks of and learning rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence (Richards and Rodgers 1986, as cited in Nunan, 1988).

In seeking to answer questions like: ‘What does the learner want/need to do with the target language? rather than, ‘What are the linguistic elements which the learner needs to master?’, syllabus designers start to rethink about syllabus content that needs to be specified, not only in terms of the grammatical elements which the learners were expected to master, but also in terms of the functional skills they would need to master in order to communicate successfully (Nunan, 1988). As a result, curriculum today takes content (from external standards and local goals) and shapes it into a plan for how to conduct effective teaching and learning. However, most language teaching theories still have elements of traditional approaches to content selection.

As far as applied linguistics is concerned, criteria for the choice of syllabus items (content) as well as their sequencing are two concepts that cause popular dominant debates in the early and mid-twentieth century (Mackey, 1965, as cited in Richards, 2001). Syllabuses are basically concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learned through as text analysis, intuition and frequency counts. When one acquires a syllabus, either in the form of an institutional document or as a textbook, one is acquiring access to a collection of items of knowledge, designed, selected and sequenced to carry him from a state of ignorance to a state of knowing (Brumfit, 1979, as cited in Nunan, 1988).

The syllabus is seen in terms of the choice of content, its prioritization in the subject, and in the relationship of the learner to that content and to the teacher. According to Nunan (1988), syllabuses are practically seen from two perspectives; broadly or narrowly. From a broad view, they are expected to offer information about learners, their needs and level, from which the objectives are derived besides the situational context of teaching and learning. Furthermore, Breen and Candlin (1980) offered a detailed account of content in terms of focus, subdivision, sequence and continuity in addition to some account of preferred methods which may, in turn, be accompanied with a description of how the learning of this content is to be evaluated and presented to learners. All of the above infused by particular social, educational and subject-matter specific principles and definitions (Brumfit, 1984).

Narrowly defined, at the level of a school or even a particular class, such syllabuses are restricted to mere collections of items of content, derived from a special view of the subject-matter, broken down and sequenced in order to facilitate and optimize the learning in classrooms. In brief, whether broadly or narrowly defined, the specification of content is a cornerstone in any syllabus (Nunan, 1988).

**1.2.3.1. Criteria for Content Selection.** Richards and Rodgers (1986) pointed out that controversies of today reflect contemporary responses to questions that have been asked

often throughout the history of language teaching. What content should be selected for the teaching of EFL in the school? How should content be graded? And how can this content be applied in the teaching-learning situation? In seeking answers to these questions, we shall examine the controversy which exists over the very nature of language itself and how this influences decisions making about what to include in the syllabus. Nunan (1988) noted that the key questions that arise in this regard from different perspective as follows:

What linguistic elements should be taught?’ The question in relation to linguistics. From a learner perspective, the key question is: ‘What does the learner want to do with the language?’ Finally, from a learning perspective, the key question is: ‘What activities will stimulate or promote language acquisition?’ These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent areas of relative emphasis, and a syllabus designer will usually incorporate insights from all three perspectives. (p. 26)

Brumfit (1984) also assumed that selection of content has not been fully developed by language teachers, and deserves more consideration than it has so far received. The teacher has to select appropriate content that would meet the requirements set by the prescribed syllabus. This is very important since the selection of appropriate content will ensure pupil motivation. Richards (2013) also stated

There are many different conceptions of a language syllabus. Different approaches to syllabus design reflect different understandings of the nature of language and different views as to what the essential building blocks of language proficiency are, such as vocabulary, grammar, functions or text types. ( p. 6)

For him, Criteria for the selection of syllabus units include *frequency*, *usefulness*, *simplicity*, *learnability* and *authenticity*. Besides, Vander Walt (1988 as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) stressed the importance of *variety* and *flexibility* when planning a course as these will ensure motivation.

According to (Dippenaar, 1993), Kelly (1971), Lee (1977), Nicholls and Nicholls (1978) and Wheeler (1979) suggested the following criteria for considering any course content:

- a- Validity:** Teaching the necessary content according to national standards explicit in the Basic Education Curriculum; it also means teaching the content in order to realize the goals and objectives of the course.
- b- Authenticity:** Content must be realistic, authentic, recent and abreast of changes.
- c- Relevance:** Content must be relevant to that specific group of learners.
- d- Encouragement:** Encouraging as the learner has to feel he is making progress.
- e- Significance:** Content should never consist of too many facts, but rather the ideas should be carefully selected and facts only serve to illustrate these ideas. There should be a balance between breadth of coverage and depth of understanding.
- f- Interests:** White (1988, p.50) described interests of pupils as "a notoriously difficult area of study and always a slippery basis for organizing a syllabus". Therefore, for pupils to feel positive about learning, content should be varied and intellectually satisfying and their interests should cautiously be considered in decision making.
- g- Feasibility:** In the sense that the essential content can be covered in the amount of time available for instruction.
- h- Utility:** Will this content be of use to the learners? It is not meant only to be memorized for test and grade purposes but rather has a function after examinations.

**1.2.3.2. Factors for Specifying Course Content.** Where does specific syllabus content come from? According to Richards (2001), a course has to be developed to address a specific set of needs and to cover a given set of objectives. Besides, decision about course content reflect the planners' assumptions about the nature and use of language, its most essential elements, and how these can be organized as an efficient basis for language learning.

It is strongly believed that “the choice of a particular approach to content selection will depend on subject-matter knowledge, the learners proficiency levels, current views on second language learning and teaching, conventional wisdom, and convenience” (Richards, 2001, p.148). He added that developing initial ideas for course content often takes place simultaneously with syllabus planning, as it often depends on the type of the syllabus framework compatible with the teacher's approach and attitude. Indeed, Prabhu (1984, as cited in Berardo, 2007) confirmed that the function of a syllabus is “ to specify what is to be taught and in what order”. In this vein, Nunan (1988) pointed out that both linguistically-oriented and communicative syllabuses tend to focus on what learners should know or be able to do as a result of instruction. Therefore, the content of the material should correspond to what students need to learn, in terms of language items, and communicative strategies and any syllabus will specify all or some of the following aspects: vocabulary, grammatical structures, functions, notions, topics, themes, situations, literature, skills, activities, and tasks. Consequently, these may be realized in a variety of ways, for example as lists of grammatical items, vocabulary items, language functions, or experiential content (Nunan, 1988).

#### ***1.2.4. Content Gradation***

Content gradation is the central focus of most teachers and syllabus designers. A frequent question they often ask when addressing this issue is how the selected content should be graded?

Like many linguists who believed that any content has to be ordered, Nunan (1988) stressed the importance of grading and pointed out that some form of grading is a universal requirement in teaching and it has various purposes. It helps classify content, to assign pupils to different class groupings and to modify the syllabus and methodology. Further, grading aids the teacher to differentiate between pupils of different abilities and to organize his scheme of work.

**1.2.4.1. Criteria for Content Sequencing.** Richard (2001) stated that sequencing content is deciding which content is needed early in the course and which provides a basis for things that will be learned later. The following criteria may be basic for content sequencing.

**Criterion 1** ➡ **Simple to Complex:** content presented earlier is thought to be simpler than later items.

**Criterion 2** ➡ **Chronology:** content may be sequenced according to the order in which events occur in the real world.

**Criterion 3** ➡ **Need:** content may be sequenced according to when learners are most likely to need outside of the classroom.

**Criterion 4** ➡ **Prerequisite Learning:** the sequence of the content may reflect what is the necessary at one point as a foundation for the next step in the learning process.

**Criterion 5** ➡ **Whole to Part or Part to Whole:** in some cases, material at the beginning of a course may focus on the overall structure or organization of a topic before considering the individual components that make it up. Alternatively, the course might focus on practicing the parts before the whole.

**Criterion 6** ➡ **Spiral Sequencing:** this approach involves the recycling of items to ensure that learners have repeated opportunities to learn them.

**1.2.4.2. Criteria for Grading Content.** Grading content is essential and various sets of contradicting criteria on how to implement this practically are available.

As with selection of content, grading can be based on a particular view of learning, such as learning any content from the easiest to that which is considered most difficult, or from familiar to the student to that which is unknown. Grading can be also based on the situation in the classroom, taking into consideration which content is the easiest to teach and explain and which is most difficult to teach and learn.

Alternatively, Tyler (1986, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) suggested other criteria for grading ;

- a- Continuity:** When teaching any subject, there should be a continual revision of content, especially the most useful to the pupil. There should, however, be an increasing level of difficulty, besides varying complexity of the introduced content.
- b- Sequence** stresses the importance of experiences building on previous ones and implies increasingly more difficult skills to understand them in greater breadth and depth.
- c- Integration** refers to a unified view overall towards other curriculum experiences. Some skills can be applied to other areas as well when content is graded in relation to other subject fields.

According to Richard (2001), Palmer (1964) as well as Breen and Candlin (1980) assumed that grading is determined by the ability of the pupil to cope with the content, rather than by the degree of difficulty. Wilkins (1976, as cited in Nunan, 1988) suggested that no step-by-step or cumulative grading of content is necessary and that grading is influenced more by the learner than by the content. What is easy for one learner is not necessarily so for another. As no one can really predict content, learners can develop their own sequencing of learning. They felt that grading is, therefore, likely to be a cyclic process where learners are continually developing related frameworks knowledge and ability, rather than accumulating separable blocks of knowledge.

In this vein, Dippenaar (1993) noted that Corder (1975) and Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) suggested a spiral approach, where the same sociocultural theme, structural category or language function is studied in greater depth at successive levels of learning. They added the teacher can revise content one or two months after its initial presentation. In a spiral

ordering, the learner is required to return again and again to some aspect of the subject with the reappearance of items in new contexts

### ***1.2.5. Content Selection and Gradation within Different Syllabuses***

Linguists encounter different types of syllabuses which differ in general concepts to language teaching. Criteria for Selection and Gradating items have been of major interest in any syllabus design, as well as their interrelation.

**1.2.5.1. Grammatical / Structural Syllabus (Formal Syllabus).** A grammatical syllabus is based on the structures of a language and organizing learning around this type of syllabus has been the most common practice, mostly because it is the easiest type of syllabus to sequence. The behaviorist approach played an important role in the early conception of this syllabus, i.e. complex behaviours are broken down into small parts and taught until the entire behaviour is covered. In the simple word, the learner masters separate structures of language and integrates them into a meaningful and usable whole (Nunan 1988). Thus, the syllabus input is selected and progressively graded according to grammatical notions of simplicity and complexity in comparison to learners' mother tongue and structures which are easy to teach and explain by the teacher before the difficult ones. Besides, the items which share some similarities are closely placed and the most frequently used structures are placed earlier.

**1.2.5.2. Functional-Notional Syllabuses.** In the 1980s, the shift from grammar and lexis as the primary components of a syllabus to communicative units of syllabus organization, led to proposals for a number of different syllabus models, including notional, functional, text and task-based-models.

Functions can be described as the communicative purposes for which we use language while notions (semantico-grammatical categories) are the conceptual meanings like states of affairs, entities and logical relationships which we express through language and interact significantly with grammatical categories (Wilkins 1972, as cited in Nunan, 1988).



Theoretically, following Widdowson's classification leads to consider functional-notional syllabuses as basically synthetic, but in practice, language lessons focus not on structures, but rather on notional, conceptual or functional areas (Nunan 1988). According to Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, as cited in Nunan, 1988), teaching a language in the form of functions is based on the needs of the pupils and situations that they might encounter. In addition, Wilkins (1976) said that functions take the communicative facts of language into account without losing sight of the grammatical and situational factors.

In sum, Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1989, as cited in Dippenaar, 1993) suggested that a functional-notional syllabus would be a "formidable document" and that the pupils' needs would first have to be ascertained and analysed. This would lead to a syllabus that covers all possible situations that the pupil may encounter. Such an elaborate syllabus would be impractical for a general language course at school level and would be more appropriate for an ESP course.

**1.2.5.3. The Procedural Syllabus.** Basically, it was established by Prabhu in the Bangalore Project (1987). The fundamental hypothesis of the procedural syllabus is that form is best acquired when attention is focused on meaning, i.e. the aim of this syllabus is the appropriate completion of tasks without bothering about the language system. Full consciousness is required of all learners in every attempt to receive or to convey meaningful messages; as a consequence, language system will be developed unconsciously. In this sense, Prabhu (1987) stated that

It is not claimed that meaning-focused activity eliminates all attention by learners to language samples as form. Such total elimination is probably impossible in any form of teaching, and possibly inconsistent with normal language use. The claim is rather that meaning-focused activity ensures that any attention to form is convergent to dealing with meaning and self-initiated. (p.75)

Typically, the consideration for sequencing or grading the content in Procedural syllabus is neglected since it consists, not of a list of items determined through some form of linguistic analysis, nor of a description of what learners will be able to do at the end of a course, but of the specification of the tasks and activities that learners will engage in class (Nunan 1988).

**1.2.5.4. Content-based syllabuses.** Unlike science, history, or mathematics, language is not a subject in its own right, but merely a vehicle for communication. This concept was a stimulus for developing the content-based syllabus in the notion that it facilitates learning not only through language but with it. It provides the pupil with an analytic knowledge of the target language and its rules and organization. This type of syllabi focuses on objectives to be achieved and content to be learned. According to Nunan (1988), it differs from task-based syllabus in that experiential content, which provides the departure point for the syllabus, and which is usually organized around vocabulary and structures, situations, topics, functions and notions and derived from some fairly well-defined subject areas in a school curriculum such as science, medicine, or social studies and, which consists of lists of linguistic elements to be learnt. Mohan (1986, as cited in Nunan, 1988 ) argued for content-based syllabuses on the grounds that good learning cannot be achieved if language learning and subject-matter learning are considered as totally unrelated operations.

By selecting subject areas, logic and coherence is given rather than a random collection of tasks. This may provide a non-linguistic rationale for selecting and grading content. Syllabuses take as their point of departure the skills and knowledge which are important for learners. Units of work thus appear with labels such as 'health', 'education', and 'social services'. As the intensive exposure to one unique subject may be boring, it is important for teachers to negotiate with the learners and demonstrate the relationship between language and content (Nunan 1988).

**1.2.5.5. Task /Task-based Syllabus (TBS).** Originally, it came as a reaction to the failure of the conventional 3 Ps approach (Presentation, Practice and Production) which focuses on targeted structures through classroom activities such as substitution drills and translation exercises. Long and Crookes (1992) regarded task syllabus as an alternative to the procedural and process syllabuses which are deficient as they neither provide procedures for task selection on learners' needs, nor present criteria for task sequencing. Task syllabus which is based on the studies of L2 learning processes, on the findings of classroom researches and on the principles of course design, maintains that language is best learned when attention is focused on meaning and on saying and doing things with language. Further, Prabhu (1987) suggested that the basis of each lesson be a task, and that there be no pre-selection of language items for any given lesson or activity and no practice of language items. When the teacher uses tasks to teach ESL, the pupil focuses on completing a specific task rather than learning language, which is likely to lead to communicative competence. Thus, second language learning is considered as a non-linear process and the pre-selection of linguistic items are abandoned (Nunan 1988).

As part of Hutchinson and Waters' survey, a model combining the four elements of content, input, language, and task was developed. Accordingly, the language and content are drawn from the input, and selected primarily as a response to what the learners need to do with the task. It is evident that pupils' interest and needs should receive priority when tasks are selected in terms of real-life situations (Long & Crookes, 1992). Interestingly, the task component is central and the criteria for judging its worth is the degree of difficulty which is the key factor in determining the ordering of items presented to learners in a syllabus, though the problem for the task-based syllabus is that a variety of factors will interact in determining its difficulty (Nunan 1988).

### ***1.2.6. Status of Pronunciation in Foreign Language Course Content***

In comparison with grammar and vocabulary, less interest is devoted to teaching pronunciation, though it is an essential aspect of language (Harmer, 2001). Subsequently, it remains a neglected element during the selection and the organization of the content of most coursebooks as well (Kelly, 2000). This neglect seriously affects its development on both levels; research and classroom practice. However, recently, there are valuable discussions about whether pronunciation is to have a place in the language curriculum and what is to be included in pronunciation as a curriculum area and the best ways to it (Pennington, 2021).

Initially, segmental features and articulation are prior interests to pronunciation teaching. The content is selected and progressively graded according to general notions of simplicity, complexity, frequency and familiarity, as Lado (1957, as cited in Richard, 2001) argued, those different and new sounds will be difficult in learning the foreign language.

It is evident that language helps people interact and promote mutual understanding and this can be achieved through a good mastery of intonation, stress, and rhythm. Thus, learning the suprasegmental features is as important as that of segmental features (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Consequently, the three approaches to Pronunciation Teaching, namely, intuitive, analytic-linguistic and integrative approach emphasize the suprasegmentals features through meaningful task-based activities that facilitate learning.

### ***1.2.7. Algerian Educational System.***

In Algeria, the syllabus is an official document provided by the department of education which basically describes the aims, content and organization of work to be done in a specific standard during the school year. The main objective of teaching English as a foreign language is to develop necessary skills for carrying out successful communication and total engagement in the environment. For this reason, many methods and approaches have been adopted in order to have effective Educational System. Recently, the failure of the previous

approaches and methods to achieve these objectives, called for a process of innovation concerning teaching methods and adopting an urgent reform project of the whole educational policy of the country and design a new more fruitful curriculum. The choice fell upon the Competency-Based Approach which seeks to develop language proficiency as well as the mastery of subject matter, critical thinking, and other cognitive skills through the use of a syllabus that integrates both language and subject matter (the law of orientation 04.08 January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008). CBA is another widely used curriculum specified the learning outcomes in terms of ‘competencies’; knowledge, skills and behaviors. It involves learners in performing everyday tasks and activities which they should master at the end of the course (Richards, 2013). However, in practice, a set of challenges are facing Algerian EFL teachers in implementing CBA with a reference to the teaching /learning situation in general and the content presented to the pupils at school in particular. As a result, the types of content and activities that the teacher employs in the classroom failed to achieve the desired outcomes set by curriculum which need to be rectified and adapted to respond to learners’ needs and interests and renew the Algerian educational system.

### **Conclusion**

Pronunciation is a very vital aspect in teaching languages and its importance cannot be disregarded. This chapter seeks to shed light on the general concept of pronunciation teaching besides selecting and grading content through an exposure of the previous researches and dominant theories in the field. It also provides a thorough framework for English pronunciation teaching in a hopeful attempt to achieve promising results.

The conclusion we drew is that, in spite of various contradicting opinions, it is highly emphasized that the pronunciation content has to be organized in a certain way before it can be presented to pupils. Through the use of teacher’s own initiative in combination with the implementation of the gradual criteria to suit their level. Only by this learners’ pronunciation will be more accurate and their attitudes towards it will be more positive.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Field Work**

### **Introduction**

Unlike the previous chapter which sheds the light on the theoretical background relevant to the research topic, this chapter is devoted to the empirical part that is basically conducted to tackle the problem, collect the information required to answer the research questions and achieve the desired aim of the study.

The chapter at hand is divided in two sections, namely teachers' questionnaire and classroom observation. Each section includes a detailed analysis of the obtained findings that is followed by a discussion. Finally, it sums up with some recommendations for future researches.

### **2.1. Section One: Teachers' Questionnaire**

#### ***2.1.1. Administration of the Questionnaire***

The present questionnaire is designed to investigate the teachers' perspectives about the suitability of the pronunciation content gradation to third year middle school pupils. A total of 50 participants from different wilayas in Algeria were involved in the study. The questionnaire was distributed to them via Google Forms. The participants have taken sufficient time to answer it for more valid and reliable responses.

#### ***2.1.2. Description of the Questionnaire***

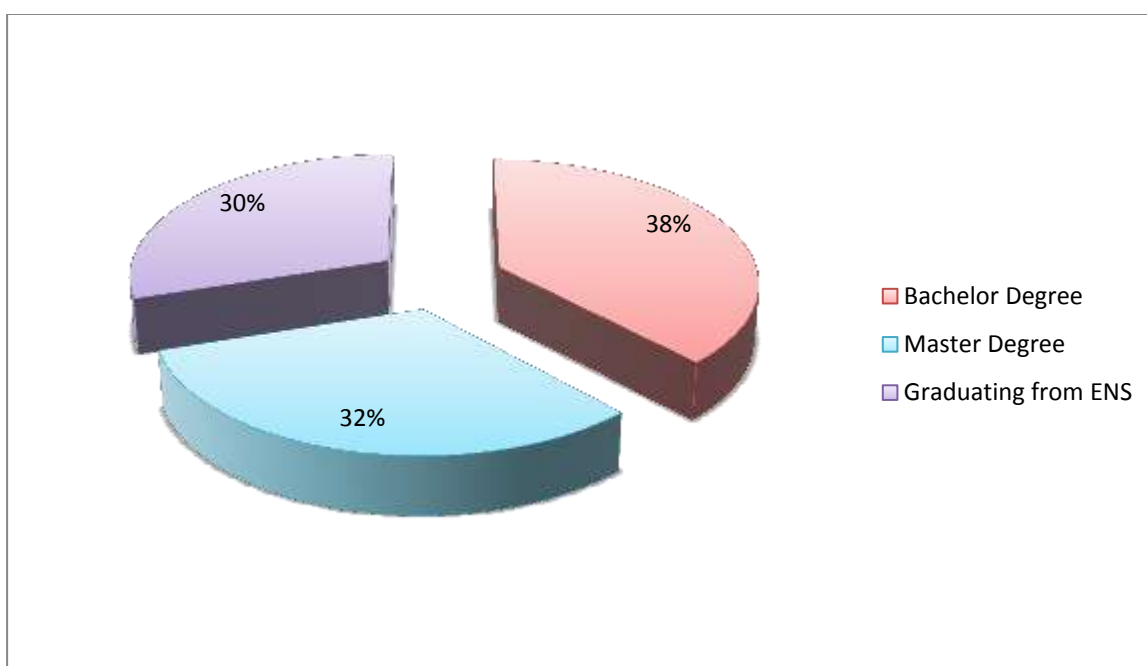
The teachers' questionnaire is made up of four sections and its entirety contains 19 questions organized from general to specific and varied in type between open-ended and closed-ended. Multiple choice questions constitute the majority of them. The present questionnaire opens up with an introductory paragraph which cognizes the participants about the study aim. The first part seeks to compile on the academic data in relation to the degrees

they hold, type of training they received, their teaching experience in general and that of teaching third year in particular. The second section is based on inquiring about the participants' views about teaching pronunciation to third year pupils as well as the difficulties encountered by the teachers and pupils. The third section is the core of the questionnaire where participants are asked about their attitudes on the pronunciation content gradation and its suitability to the pupils' level and needs. The concluding part is a space for sharing comments and suggestions related to the aim of the study.

### *2.1.3. Analysis of the Questionnaire*

#### **Part 01: Background Information (Q1- Q3)**

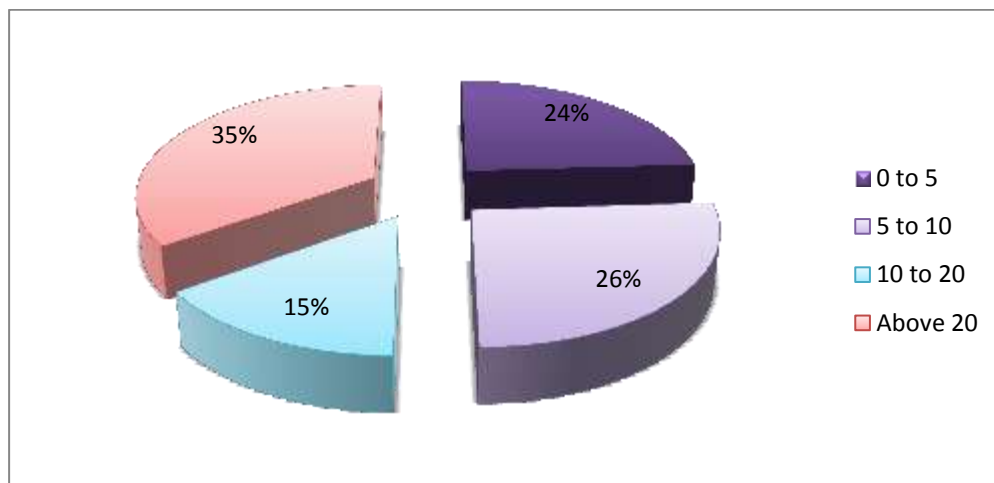
##### **Q1: What is your academic degree?**



**Graph 2.01: Participants Academic Degrees**

From the data above, it is noticed that teachers' academic qualifications vary between those who hold a bachelor degree, a master degree and those who graduated from ENS. 38% of them have a bachelor degree, 32% hold a master degree, while 30% were trained at ENS.

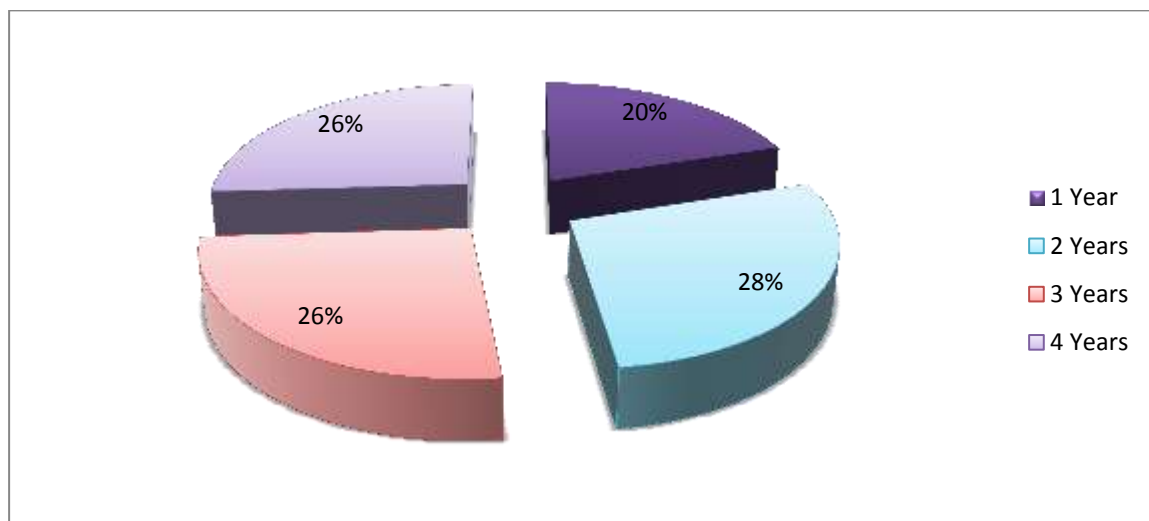
### Q2: How long have you been teaching English?



**Graph 2.02: Participants' Teaching Experience**

Graph 2.02 provides that almost the third of the participants have taught English for more than 20 years while thirteen participants have taught from five to ten years. In addition, 24 % of the informants have been English teachers for less than five years and a small number of participants has taught English from ten to twenty years. Thus, the data mentioned above indicate that the majority of the questioned participants have a long expertise in teaching that allows them to provide us with more accurate information since they experienced teaching English with different syllabuses.

### Q3: How long have you experienced teaching third year middle school pupils?



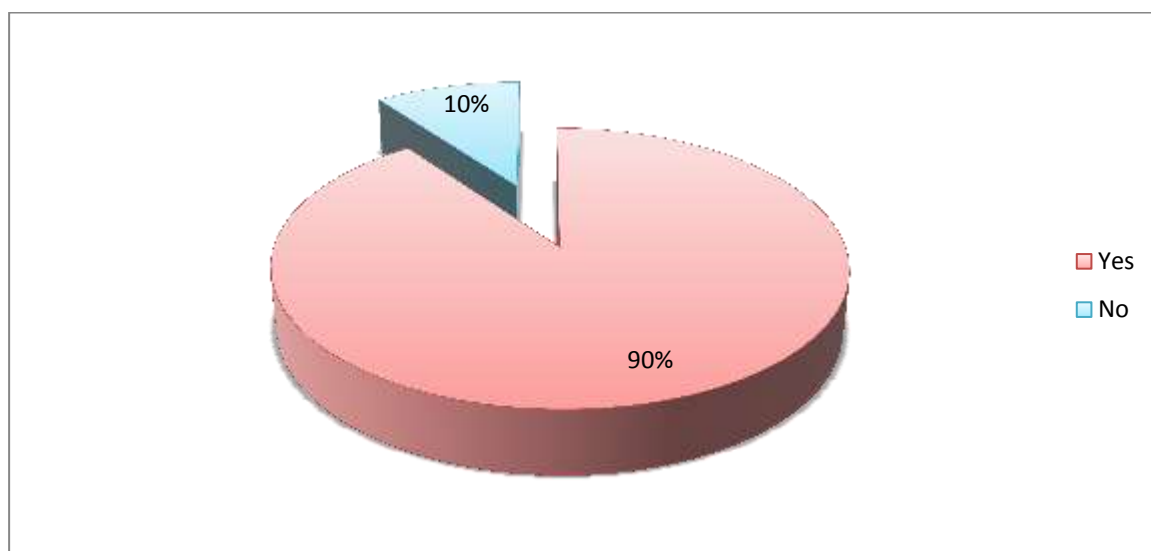
**Graph 2.03: Experience in Teaching Third Year Middle School**



Question 3 seeks to know the experience of the questioned teachers in teaching third year pupils with second generation textbook. The statistics shown above denote that the overwhelming majority of the participants (80 %) have an expertise in teaching third year between two and four years. While 20 % of them taught them once.

## Part 02: Pronunciation

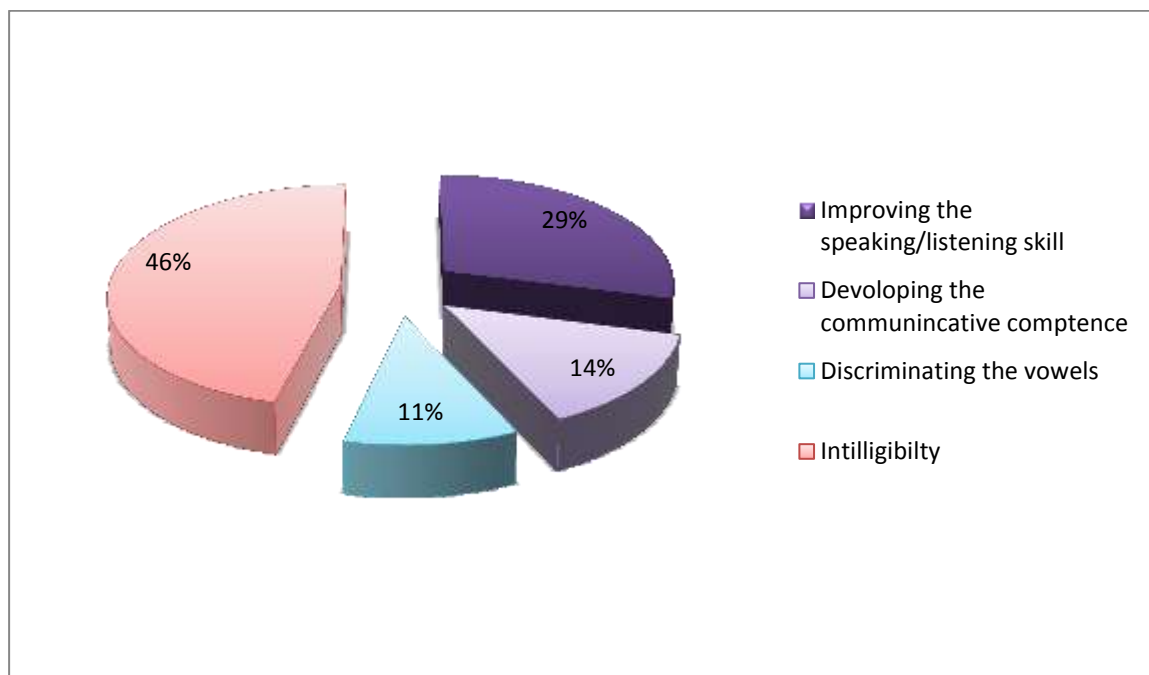
**Q4: Do you think that teaching pronunciation is important for pupils?**



**Graph 2.04: Importance of Pronunciation to Third Year Middle School Pupils**

This item investigates the degree of importance of teaching pronunciation to third year pupils from teachers' perspective. The data shown in the previous graph prove that the majority of the respondents agree on the significance of teaching pronunciation to their pupils. Five teachers, conversely, are ignorant of its importance.

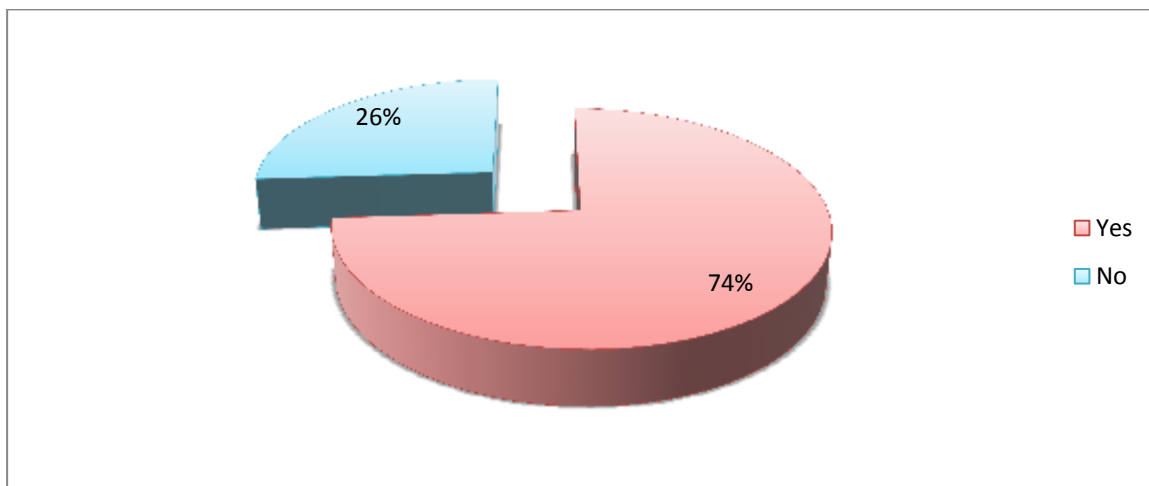
**Q5: If yes, please say why?**



**Graph 2.05: Arguments for Teaching Pronunciation**

This question is an open-ended question; only thirty seven participants responded to it. As the graph shows, a considerable number of informants assumed that pronunciation is an essential aspect in language teaching because it helps the pupils to utter words properly and makes them understood by others. 27% believed that teaching pronunciation is of a crucial role because it enhances the learners' listening/ speaking skills and helps them speak fluently. In addition, 13% of the teachers argued that pronunciation must be taught in order to help pupils communicate effectively using the English language and the remaining respondents (10%) claimed that teaching pronunciation is important because it assists the learners to differentiate between the sounds.

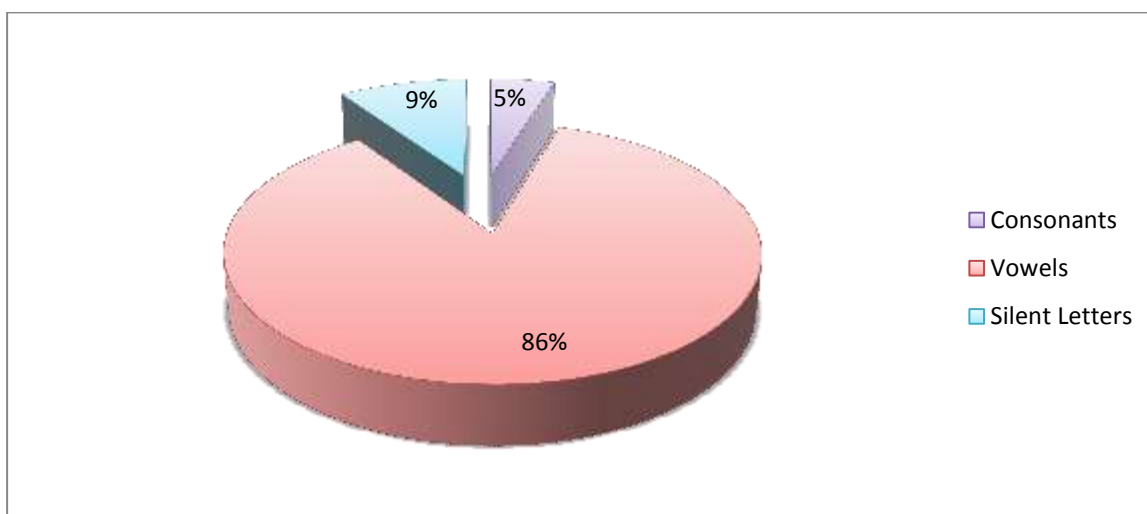
**Q6: Do you consider teaching English pronunciation to middle school pupils a difficult teaching task?**



**Graph 2.06: Difficulty of Teaching Pronunciation to Middle School Pupils**

The aim of including this item in the questionnaire is to reveal the extent of teaching pronunciation difficulty. Graph number 6 demonstrates that almost three quarters of the participants have considered pronunciation as a difficult teaching task whereas the remaining quarter claimed that teaching pronunciation to middle school pupils is an easy task. Thus, the data obtained indicate that the majority of the respondents face difficulties in teaching English pronunciation to third year pupils.

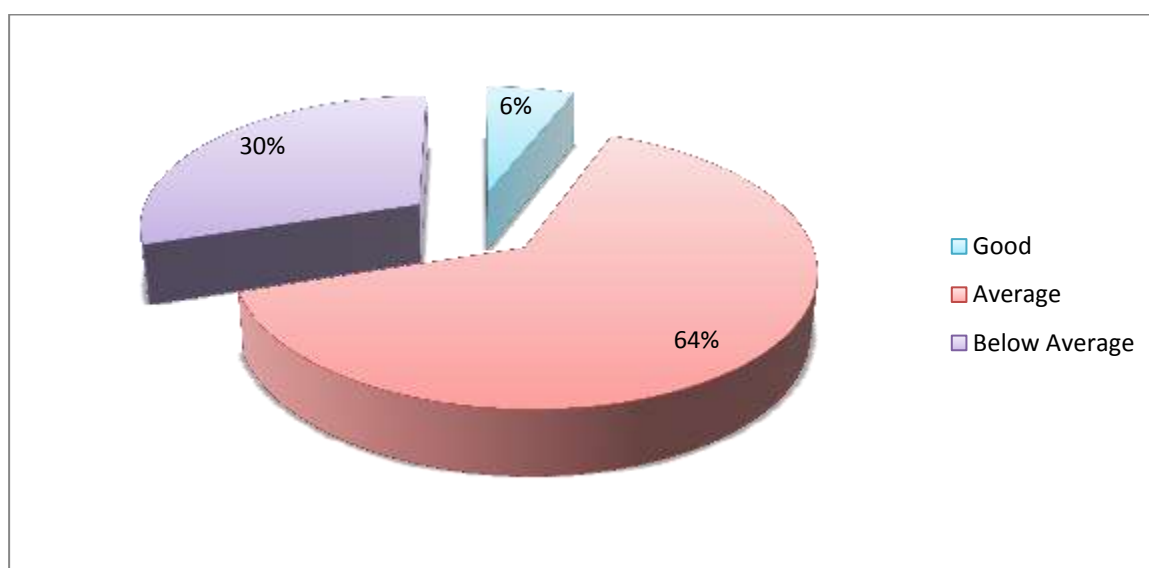
**Q7: If “yes”, what is the most difficult Pronunciation aspect(s) in teaching?**



**Graph 2.07: Most Difficult Pronunciation Aspects**

The participants who opted for “yes” in the previous question imparted a multiplicity of problematic pronunciation features in teaching. Almost all the teachers agreed on one feature. As it is highly noticed in graph 7, the majority of the teachers believed that vowels are the most difficult aspects while teaching pronunciation which makes it a difficult task. Besides, the instructors claimed that consonants and silent letters do not bring about enormous problems to their pupils.

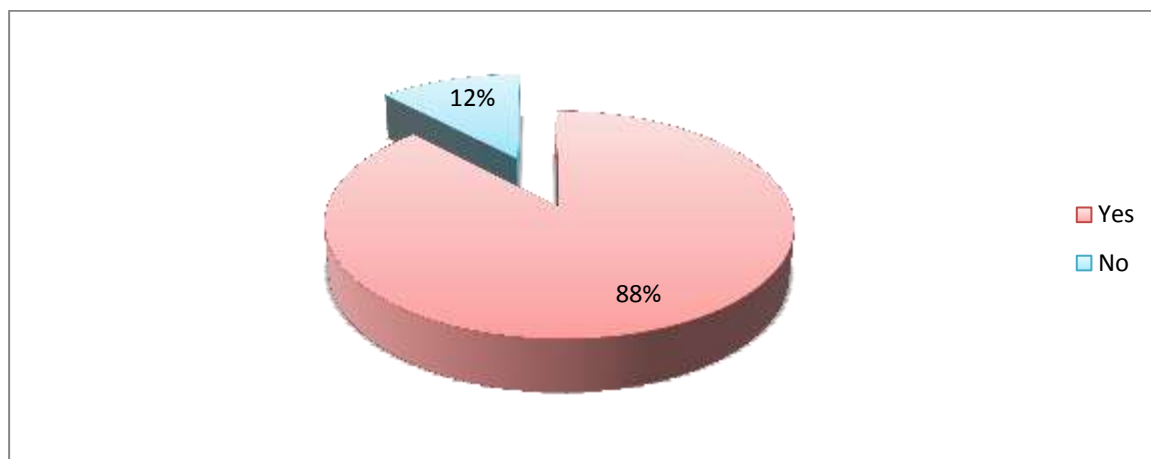
**Q8: How would you describe your learners’ level in pronunciation?**



**Graph 2.08: Pupils’ Pronunciation Level**

It was necessary for the researcher to inquire about the pupils’ level of pronunciation in order to have a clear vision about them and, more importantly, to check the pronunciation content suitability. The data denote that 64% of the teachers agreed upon their learners’ pronunciation level being average. Fifteen teachers stated that their learners’ level in pronunciation is poor while only three teachers claimed that their pupils’ level is good. The conclusion that could be drawn from data mentioned is that most teachers are not satisfied with their pupils’ level in pronunciation.

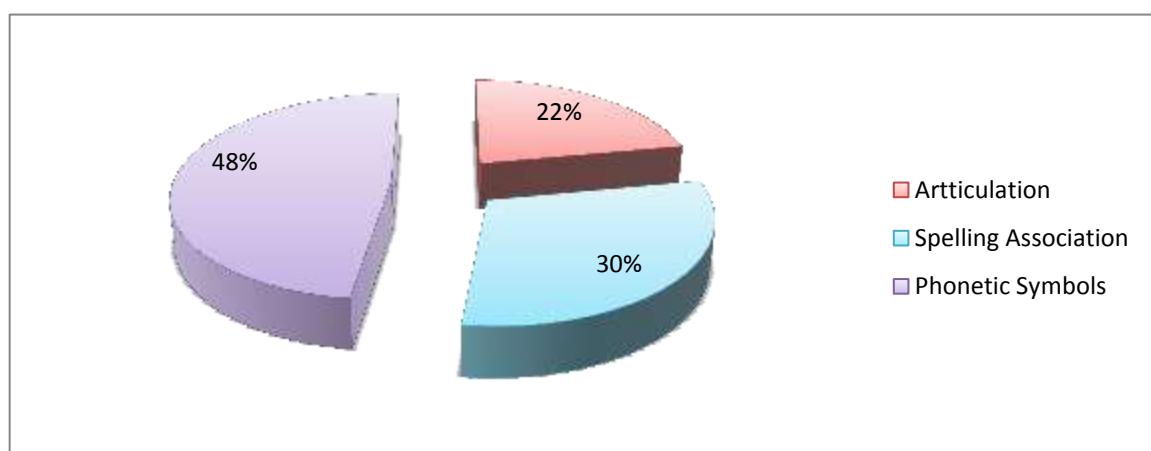
**Q9: Do your pupils face difficulties in learning English Pronunciation?**



**Graph 2.09: Difficulty of Learning Pronunciation**

The graph demonstrates that the majority of the participants (88%) responded to this question by choosing “yes”. Thus, the third middle school pupils find learning pronunciation as a problematic learning task. Six teachers claimed that pupils do not face any difficulties in pronunciation lessons. The result gives a hint that third year middle school pupils encounter difficulties when learning pronunciation.

**Q10: What do you think the frequent difficulties pupils encounter in learning English Pronunciation are due to?**

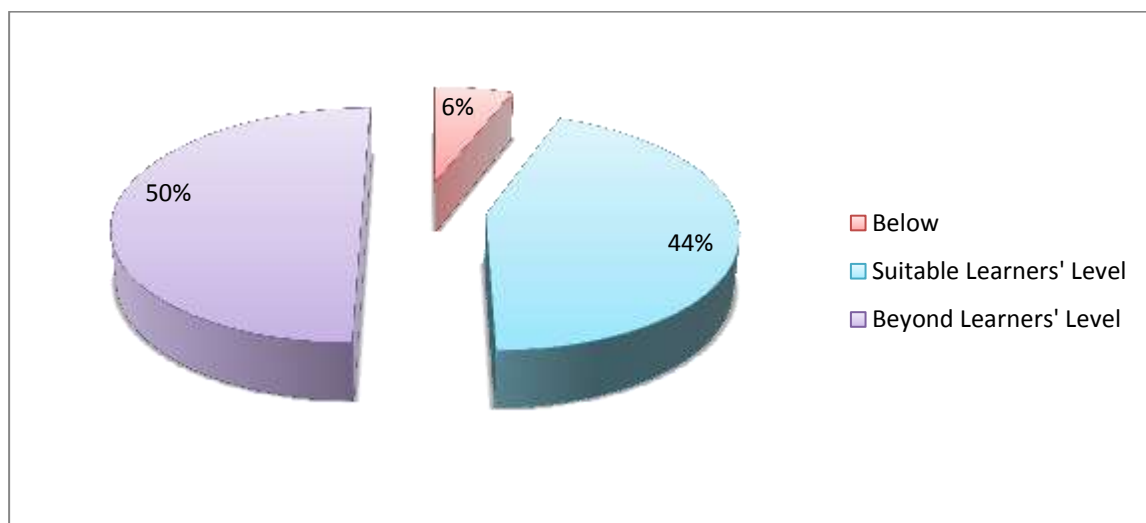


**Graph 2.10: Reasons of Pronunciation Learning Difficulty**

The purpose behind this question is to provide explanations about reasons that made learning pronunciation a difficult task to third year pupils based on their teachers' observations and tests. As the graph shows, for about half of the teachers agreed on phonetic transcription being the most problematic for third year pupils. Spelling association takes the second position of the most challenging aspects with fifteen teachers who argued that the pupils find pronunciation difficult to learn due to the ambiguous English spelling system; many sounds to one spelling and vice versa. 20% of the informants think that the articulation of the English vowels makes their learning process difficult. From the results obtained from this question, it can be figured out that the majority of teachers believe that phonetic transcription and spelling association cause major problems to their pupils.

### Part 3: Content

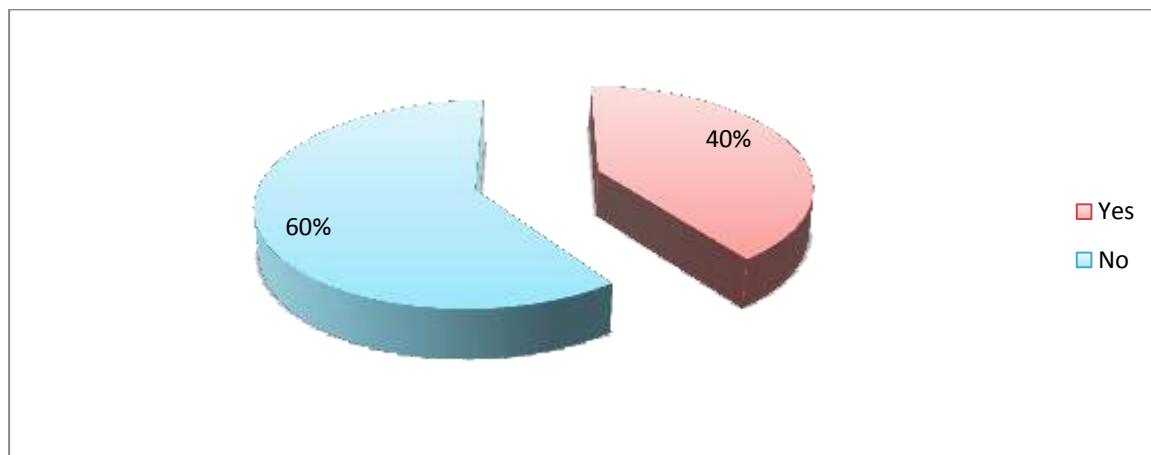
#### Q11: How would you consider the content of pronunciation in 3rd year?



**Graph 2.11: Content Suitability to Third Year Pupils**

This question tends to investigate the suitability of the pronunciation content to the target group. Graph 11 shows that half of the participants believed that the content is beyond learners' level. Whereas 22 informants opted for the suitability of the content to the learners, only three subjects stated that pronunciation features presented in the third year textbook is below the pupils' level. Thus, the pronunciation content is beyond the level of the pupils.

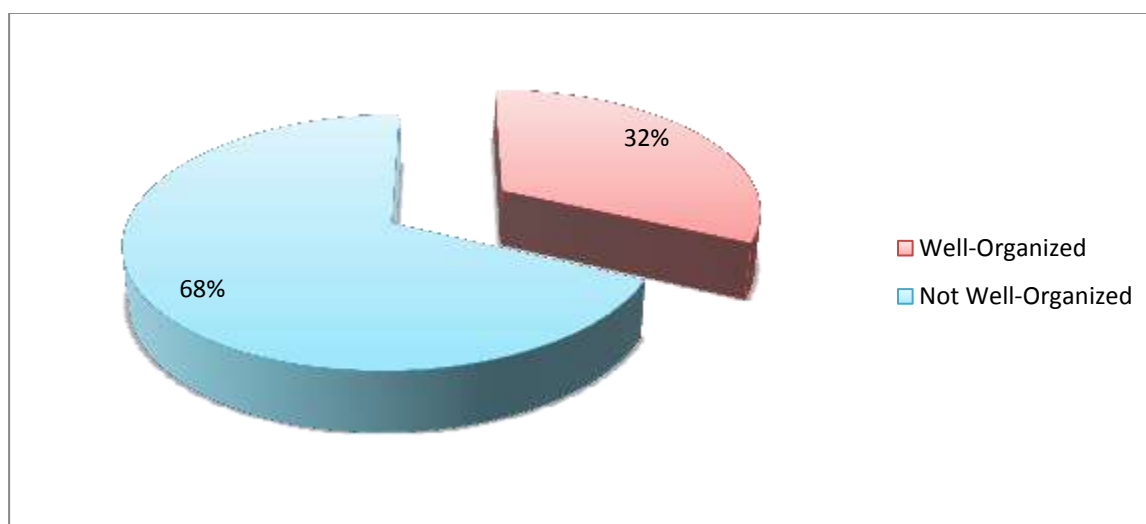
**Q12: Does the content presented to 3rd year pupils cover the necessary pronunciation features?**



**Graph 2.12: Content Coverage of Necessary Pronunciation Features**

The aim behind this question is to check to what extent the content presented in the third middle school year cover the necessary pronunciation features. The graph shows that the content presented in the third middle school year does not cover the pronunciation features that ought to be learnt by the pupils because 60% of the participants opted for that choice and only 40% informants responded positively to this item.

**Q 13: How organized are the pronunciation items presented in « I pronounce » lesson?**

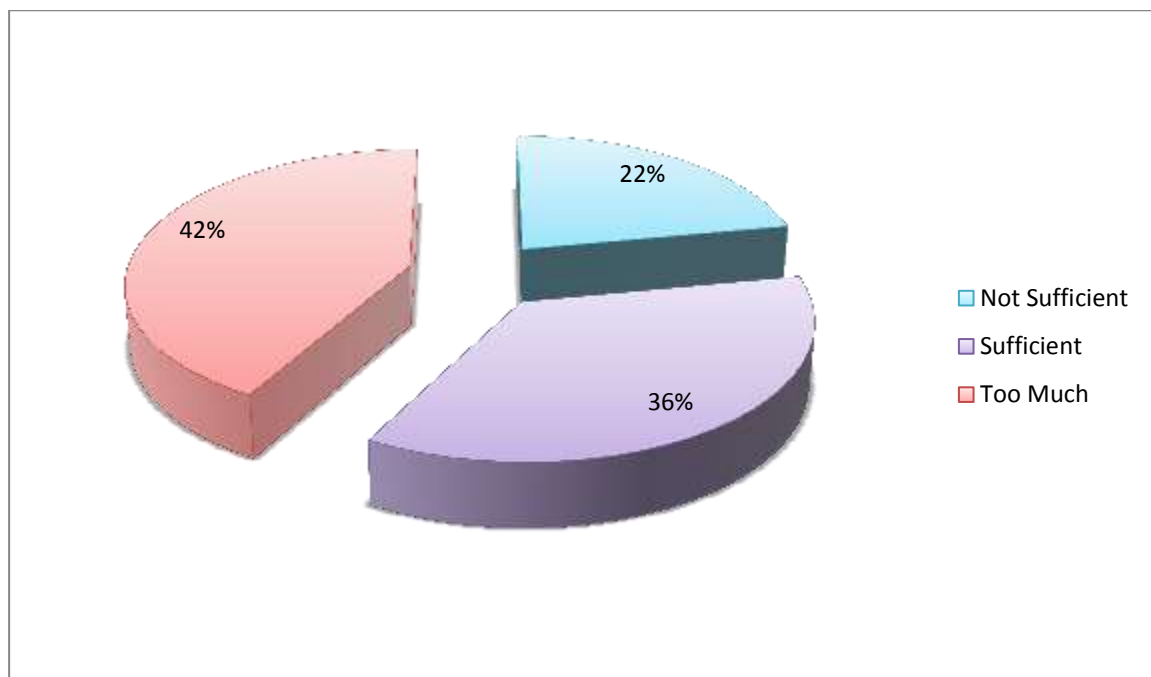


**Graph 2.13: Organization of Pronunciation Content**

The purpose behind this question is to investigate the organization of the pronunciation content. As the graph above shows, most of the teachers (68%) stated that the

pronunciation content is not well organized. The remaining participants (32%) believed that the pronunciation features presented in third year middle school course are well-organized. This is a clear indication that the majority of the teachers are not satisfied with the organization of the pronunciation content addressed to their pupils.

**Q14: The vowel sounds provided in each pronunciation lesson are**

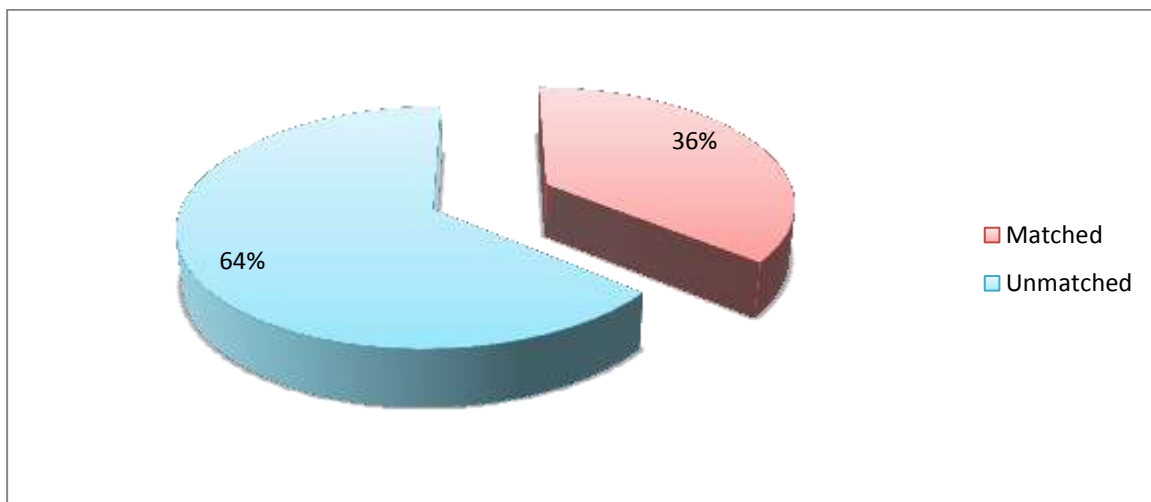


**Graph 2.14: Sufficiency of Vowel Sounds in Pronunciation Lessons**

The purpose from including this item is to investigate to what extent the number of vowel sounds presented in each lesson is sufficient to third year middle school pupils. A closer look at the data above reveals that the textbook presents unacceptable number of vowel sounds per lesson because the option “Too much” received the largest number of the participants’ responses. In addition, 36% of the teachers chosen the option “Sufficient” and a lowest number of participants opted for the option “Not Sufficient”.



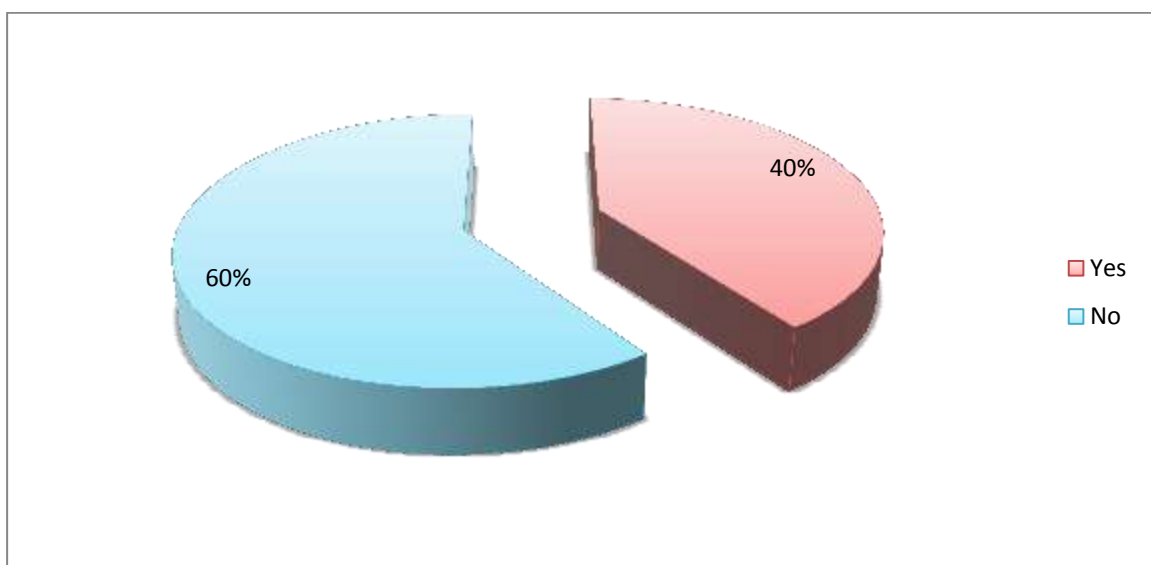
**Q15: The vowel sounds to be learnt in one lesson are sometimes .....**



**Graph.2.15. Correspondence of Vowel Sounds in Pronunciation Lessons**

This question aims at investigating the homogeneity of vowel sounds presented in the same lesson. While 36% of the questioned teachers stated that the lessons present matched vowel sounds, 64% of the teachers, as indicated in the graph above, declared that the lessons of pronunciation provide unmatched vowel sounds, and sometimes have nothing in common. And this will, surely, make the process of learning more problematic for the pupils.

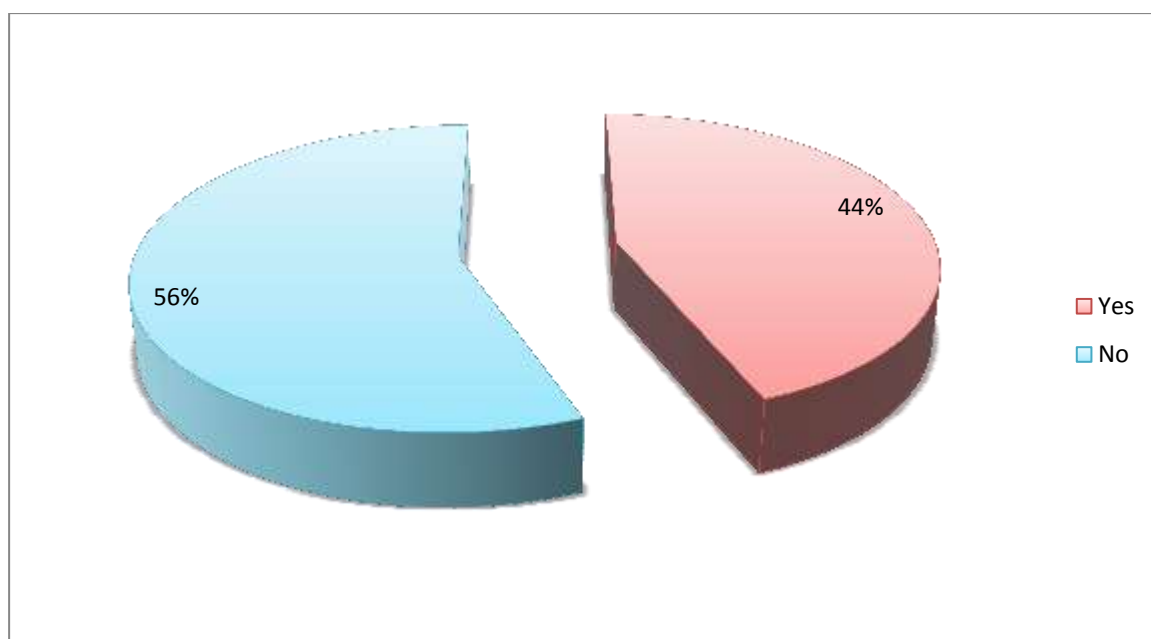
**Q16: Do you think the pronunciation content is selected and graded to meet the pupils' needs?**



**Graph 2.16: Suitability of Pronunciation Content Gradation to Pupils' Needs**

This question is designed to investigate the teachers' opinions about the suitability of My Book of English pronunciation content selection and gradation to learners' needs. Based on the results above, it can be noticed that more than half of the subjects declared that the pronunciation lessons are not well selected and graded to meet third year pupils' needs. The remaining teachers (40%), on the contrary, claimed that the pronunciation content selection and gradation are compatible with the pupils' needs.

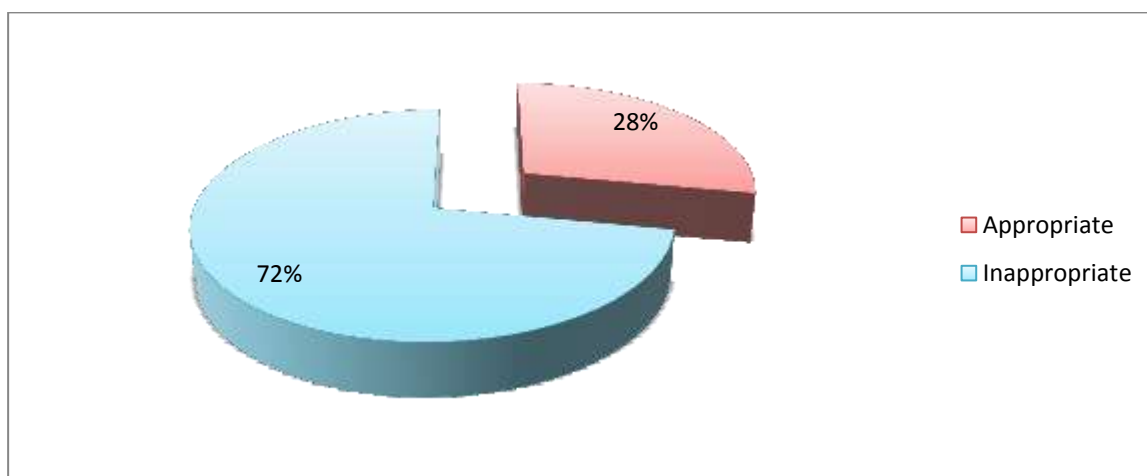
**Q17: Are the pronunciation features presented gradually from simple to complex?**



**Graph 2.17: Increase of Presented Pronunciation Features in Difficulty**

The data mentioned in the previous graph prove that 56% of the teachers claimed that the pronunciation features are not well graded in terms of their difficulty. Conversely, the rest of the informants (44%) said that the pronunciation features moved progressively from simple to complex. This leads to the conclusion that a notable percentage of teachers agree on the fact that the simplicity criterion in selecting and grading the content is not well respected.

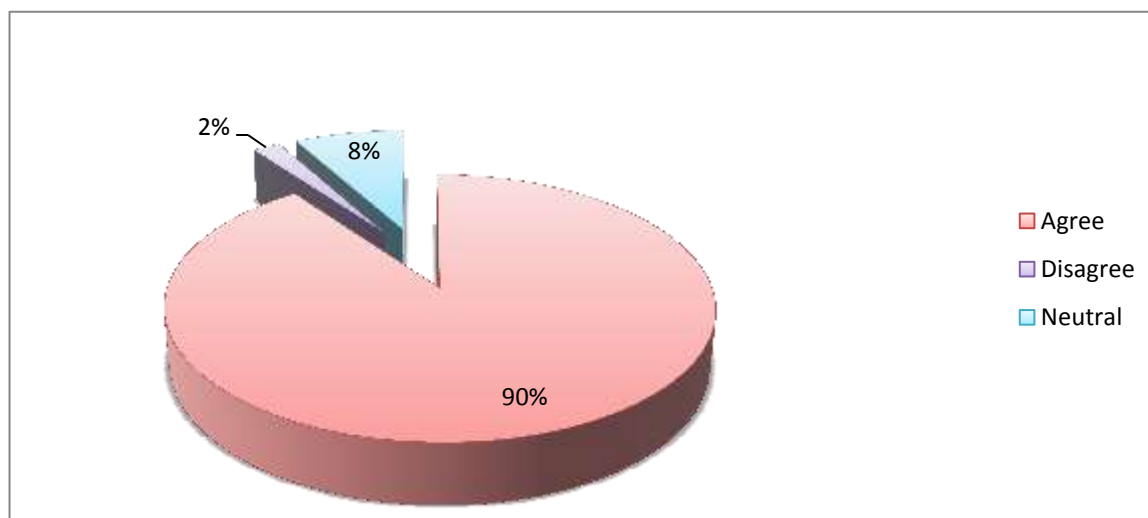
**Q18: How appropriate do you think the content gradation in teaching vowels pronunciation for 3rd year is?**



**Graph 2.18: Appropriateness of Vowel Pronunciation Content Gradation for 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Pupils**

Including this item in the teachers' questionnaire seeks to explore the fitness of the vowels pronunciation gradation to the level of the pupils. From the data obtained above, 72% of the subjects informed that the vowel sounds are inappropriately graded in third year textbook; however, fourteen teachers stated that the vowel sounds gradation is suitable to third year middle school pupils.

**Q19: The inappropriate content gradation affects the poorness of learners' pronunciation.**



**Graph 2.19: Effect of Inappropriate Content Gradation on Pupils' Level**

This question tends to know the effect of the inappropriate content gradation on the pupils' pronunciation level. The associated graph reveals that the majority of the participants (90%) declared that content which is inappropriately graded leads to the pupils' poorness in pronunciation. Whereas only one teacher claimed that the unsuitable gradation of the content does not affect their level of pronunciation and four participants preferred to be neutral. This leads to the conclusion that most of the teachers agree on the fact that the inappropriateness of content selection and gradation affects the level of the pupils in pronunciation.

#### **Part 4: Teachers' Suggestions**

The questionnaire was concluded with an open request to teachers to share any comments, or suggestions concerning the research topic. It was not answered by all the participants. However, a notable amount of valuable recommendations was given by some teachers as the following:

- ✚ Learners of third middle school year need to have just an introduction to pronunciation by drilling some consonant sounds and then exposed (explicitly) deeply to short vowels.
- ✚ Teaching pronunciation for this level is important and difficult at the same time. So, the use of easy methods with an association of needs analysis is highly recommended.
- ✚ Teaching pronunciation should be taught through rhymes and games not just rules given. Besides, the learners should be tested on speaking to evaluate their pronunciation as well as comprehension.
- ✚ The intensive practice is recommended to be the best way to improve pronunciation in the third year classes.
- ✚ More focus should be on the listening skill which is basic in learning correct pronunciation of any language. Besides, the use of authentic audio materials is very essential to make the process of teaching English pronunciation in the Algerian schools more successful and effective.

#### ***2.1.4. Discussion of Results***

During Phase 1, data were drawn from a questionnaire survey which elicited both quantitative and qualitative responses from 50 third year middle school teachers. The survey tends to record teachers' perceptions about a range of issues associated with teaching pronunciation and content selection and gradation.

The obtained findings reveal that the majority of the teachers admit the great impact of pronunciation as an essential aspect on enhancing the pupils' listening/speaking skills, developing intelligible and fluent speakers and helping them communicate effectively using the English language. Nevertheless, pronunciation learning is considered a hard task due to many factors such as vowels' articulation, phonetic transcription and spelling association which cause major problems.

Concerning the content, the majority of the respondents are not satisfied with the pronunciation content neither with its sufficiency and coverage of pronunciation features that ought to be learnt, nor with its organization and presentation. Besides, lack of unity, homogeneity and balance in vowels division throughout the lessons are common problems encountered by the teachers and which call for solutions to help them overcome the difficulties of teaching pronunciation in implementing the current syllabus. Third, the pronunciation content is inappropriately selected and graded to meet the pupils' pronunciation learning needs. Finally, from the teachers' perceptions and suggestions, we come to the point that to help pupils reduce the mentioned difficulties, it is important to understand and assess content pronunciation problems, seek remedies, and handle them in class to have better achievements.

To sum it up, the previously stated results show agreement on the negative impact of the unsuitable content selection and gradation on the pupils' pronunciation level.

## **2.2. Section Two: Classroom Observation**

In order to gain first-hand information about the suitability of content gradation in learning English vowels pronunciation (third year middle school pupils), classroom observation was chosen as research method. In the implementation of the observation, the discussion is partly devoted to explaining why the note-taking method of the observations and checklists were chosen. Finally, the findings and data analysis are explicitly introduced.

### ***2.2.1. Population and Sample***

The classroom observation has been conducted with third year middle school pupils. The aim behind choosing this population is due to their familiarity with pronunciation. As it is their third year, they have already got enough background knowledge about English sound system and phonetic symbols. The target group includes a total of 15 pupils who were selected to be involved in the current study.

### ***2.2.2. Implementation***

In order to closely observe the pupils' attitudes toward the content presented to them and how it affects their level in pronunciation, an observation was conducted. Initially, I began by determining the specific objectives of the observation, designing a system for recording observed performances and specifically determining how the results will be used. The choice of the written method of the observations was considered adequate for the present purposes and was made due to practical reasons.

I attended three English classes presented by a teacher during a period of two weeks with medium-sized group of 15 pupils. The pupils ignored whether the focus of the observation was on them or their teacher. Since one of the most prominent disadvantages of observation lies in the extent to which the presence of the researcher might influence the subjects of the study, a decision was made to be *Non-participant observer*; joining the class, taking a distant role and solely observe without taking part in teaching in any way.

### 2.2.3. Observation Description

15 pupils (8 girls and 7 boys) were present during the observation that took place in the classroom. They were observed for three 45-minutes English lessons during a period of two weeks.

*Session one:* May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The first Site Visit was a morning class. In this session, the teacher presented the vowel sounds /ə/, /æ/ and /a:/. The Learning objective was to enable the learners to identify and discriminate between the three sounds.

First, she asked them to name the 5 English vowels. Next, she wrote the following words on the board then read them aloud. **\*about – again – pizza – sister** → / ə/

**\*bad - grandma - cap** → /æ/

**\*market – farmer – class – half** → /a:/

The teacher invited the pupils to read and focus on /æ/, / a:/ and / ə/. Then, she asked them to color the letter correspondent to each vowel sounds. Together with her pupils, she tried to deduce the rule. Later, they repeated another list provided in the textbook with more examples and different sound positions; initial, middle and final. Since no productive tasks are available in the textbook, the teacher was obliged to design her own ones. Pupils were supposed to classify words according to the vowel sounds they contain. After having enough time to complete the task, a collective oral correction was done and the pupils were asked to check their answers then compare them with their mates and correct one another.

*Session two:* On May 17<sup>th</sup>

In the second session, the teacher presented four vowel sounds at once: /u, u:, ə, ɜ:/. She started her class by reviewing the vowel sounds seen before /ə, æ, a:/. After that, she

wrote the text below on the board. « **This afternoon, when I went to school I took my oud. My teacher reacted pretty good because he understood how to appreciate childhood. and he generously let me play a song in full».**

Pupils were supposed to notice the colored words and say what are the repeated sounds. With the help of her pupils, the teacher tried to isolate and articulate the vowel sounds and then wrote the phonetic symbols /u, u:/. Next, pupils listen to and repeat minimal pairs with the target vowels. Later on, they did another task in which they listen and ticked the right sound. Finally, she guided them to p.56 where a part in “MY PRONUNCIATION TOOLS” entitled SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES was provided with given examples in an attempt to shed the light on the most common difficulties pupils encounter in pronunciation due to spelling association. The same procedure was followed in presenting the vowel sounds /ə/ and /ɜ:/. At the end of the session, the pupils were given a homework.

**Session three:** 23<sup>rd</sup> of May

In the last session, the teacher began with the correction of the previous homework. Then, she gave them instruction to repeat a list of words and find out repeated vowel sounds.

**\*have – back - hat →/æ/**

**\*Sunday – mother - London→/ʌ/**

**\*then – help - chess →/e/**

Pupils were supposed to focus on the new sounds which they tried to isolate and articulate. Meanwhile, with the help of their teacher, they started writing the phonetic symbols. After that, a longer list was provided in p.58 with more examples and various spellings. Later, they were invited to listen and repeat minimal pairs with the three vowel sounds. Most of the time, students pronounced words as they were written. A written task was given by the end of the lesson in which the pupils classified the words in the corresponding column /ə/, /æ/, and /ʌ/.



### 2.2.4. Results of Classroom Observation

Our classroom observation is concerned with the suitability of content gradation in learning English vowels for third year pupils and its impact on their pronunciation level in addition to discover the causes behind the pupils' pronunciation difficulties in learning the content presented to them.

Due to the wide range of information to be taken note of and for the sake of accuracy, an observation sheet checklist was designed beforehand to guide the work including essential elements to be recorded during the lessons. This served as a starting point for the classification of the data which were studied in order to analyze the content of pronunciation, i.e. what was and was not taught and how it was graded and delivered to the pupils.

- Our Observation checklist is made up of six questions. The questions were answered from what was observed during lesson regarding each vowel in addition to common remarks.

#### ➤ Vowel Sound /ə/

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     |             | √  |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     |             | √  |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? |             | √  |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     |             | √  |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

Major difficulties were noticed with the sound /ə/ as it was totally new for the pupils. It was observed that most of them were not able to imitate the teacher's pronunciation

especially in final position where they pronounced the r which should be silent. This was very common, for instance the word “sister” was uttered as it is spelled. Although written responses show good mastery of silent r rules, ~~but~~ when it comes to oral production, they often lack of control. Yet, the major problem was in mid position with spellings like o where they could not identify new words with this sound.

➤ **Sound / æ/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     | √           |    |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher’s pronunciation?                     | √           |    |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? | √           |    |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     |             | √  |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        | √           |    |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

What can be deduced from the gained data is that pupils did not encounter any problems in the pronunciation of the sound / æ/ as they found themselves familiar with. Besides, they were able to distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling as well as identify the sound in new words as it is always spelled a. However, they could not re-write the phonetic symbols as they found it somehow strange, nor discriminate it from sounds with same spelling.

➤ **Sound /ɑ:/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     |             | √  |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     |             | √  |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? | √           |    |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     | √           |    |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

On the basis of the obtained data, most of the pupils found a difficulty in articulating this sound as they are not familiar with long vowels yet. Same problems were faced in identifying new words and discriminating between similar sounds especially with l spelling association; they often pronounce it /æ/. Yet, the rule of long /ɑ:/ before r was easy for them.

➤ **Sound /ʊ/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     |             | √  |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     |             | √  |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? |             | √  |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     |             | √  |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

According to the results, the majority of the pupils face difficulties in the articulation of /ʊ/ as it is new for them. Besides, the lack of confidence most pupils have when facing new words with confusing spelling like (oo and ou). As a result, none of the pupils responded correctly as they all pronounced it /u:/.

➤ **Sound /u:/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     | √           |    |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     | √           |    |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? |             | √  |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     | √           |    |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

Pupils seem not to have too many difficulties, and errors in pronouncing /u:/ as it was not totally new for them; an equivalent to it do exist in Arabic. However, it was highly remarkable that were not able to identify new words with this sound or discriminate it from similar sounds with same spelling as (oo, u or ou).

➤ **Sound /ɜ:/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     |             | √  |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     |             | √  |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? |             | √  |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     |             | √  |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

Serious problems also occurred in pronouncing long vowels. The most was when the pupils tried to pronounce the long vowel /ɜ:/ in “work” or “bird”. As it was totally different from what they have seen before, they tended to substitute it with a short vowel and pronounce the r. This resulted in inability to identify new words which contain this sound.

➤ **Sound /ʌ/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     |             | √  |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     |             | √  |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? |             | √  |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     | √           |    |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        |             | √  |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

It was also noticed that the pupils found the /ʌ/ hard to pronounce as they do not know an equivalent to it neither in Arabic nor in French. It was also noticed that they rely on their teacher's pronunciation, and failed to identify the sounds on their own when pronouncing new words like "shut" which they pronounced /ʃʊt/.

➤ **Sound /e/**

| Question Statement   | Observation |    |
|--|-------------|----|
|  | Yes         | No |
| 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                     | √           |    |
| 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                     | √           |    |
| 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling? | √           |    |
| 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?     | √           |    |
| 5. Can they identify new words which contain the vowel sound?        | √           |    |
| 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?             |             | √  |

What was observed during the session is that pupils felt at ease with the pronunciation of /e/ as they know it in French and this helps them identify new words as well as re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves easily, though they face a little difficulty in discriminating between similar sounds like /ə/.

### 2.2.5. Discussion of Results

Based on the description of the data obtained, several remarks can be noted down. First of all, the majority of the pupils make errors in pronouncing vowels that may cause a change in meaning. Most of them pronounce English as written or substitute the vowel with easier ones. This is affected by learner's mother tongue or French as their first foreign language; *interlingual error*. Besides, major difficulties were highly remarkable while articulating sounds like /ə/ and /ʌ/ as they were totally new for the pupils. This unfamiliarity made them unable to identify new words or discriminate between similar sounds, though they tried to imitate the teacher's pronunciation but it was inadequate since it is just a blind imitation that cannot assure successful precise usage. Currently, main phonological difficulty occurs with rounded vowels /ʊ/ and /u:/ as all pupils failed to discriminate between similar sounds due to confusing spellings association especially oo, u and ou. The other source of students' errors is the complexity of some sounds like /ɜ:/ which pupils faced difficulties in pronouncing as they found it strange. It was noticed that most of them were not able to identify the sound with a different spelling. Furthermore, the majority of them found a difficulty in re-writing the phonetic symbols which seemed a bit strange as well as forgetting the use of slashes during the written phase. On the contrary, pupils seem not to have too many difficulties and errors in pronouncing /e/ and /æ/ as equivalents to them do exist in Arabic or French.

In an attempt to identify the sources of errors, content stood as the most problematic feature. The English pronunciation content for third year pupils was not well selected to include fundamental sounds like /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/ which were totally dropped out and replaced by more difficult ones like /u/, /u:/ and /ɜ:/. Moreover, the considerable difficulties in grasping due to the huge amount of new and unfamiliar vocabulary presented to them and which is most of the time characterized by long and difficult spellings.

On the whole, in the light of the content analysis, it is evident that the designed content was not well graded from simple to complex nor from familiar to new sounds to suit the pupils' level and this brought about many hindrances that obstructed the effectiveness of learning pronunciation.

In brief, observing three EFL lessons revealed a range of valuable results which can be summed up in the following two categories. First, short and long vowel sounds stood out as the bedrock of third year pronunciation content, though they are randomly and ineffectively presented. Thus, the pronunciation content was not well selected and graded to meet the pupils' level. Second, pupils encounter considerable difficulties such as lack control of basic pronunciation which was evident and caused imprecise usage, failure to identify or discriminate between the target vowel sounds, lack of awareness on the articulation and phonemic script. This is resulted in some hindrances that are diminishing learners' level like hesitation, lack of confidence and demotivation. Therefore, the syllabus failed to engage the pupils in the classroom setting in the way they are comfortable, highly motivated and learning for them is easier and enjoyable.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter is dedicated to the empirical part that it is, basically, designed to tackle the problem, gather required data to answer the research questions and reach the desired aim of the study. The teachers' questionnaire and the classroom observation went in parallel to strengthen the researcher's assumptions. Thus, it is highly emphasized that the pronunciation content gradation is not suitable to the pupils' level. On the whole, in the light of the analysis of the results obtained, we dare to say that the current syllabus does not provide the suitable vowels content in terms of selection and gradation that is negatively affected third year pupils' level in pronunciation.

## Recommendations

To begin with, this study was conducted to shed light on the content selection and focus areas of English pronunciation teaching. However, the data offered possibilities for a close examination of pronunciation teaching and the contents delivered to Algerian Middle school pupils. This reveals a set of recommendations that may be valuable.

- Increase the amount of serious academic researches oriented to content selection and gradation in teaching pronunciation.
- Regards curriculum and syllabus, planning is an essential part and the departure point of any programme is establishing a range of communicative goals and objectives that should result from a careful analysis and description of the learners' needs and interests.
- Greater appreciation from teachers and syllabus designers should be devoted to pronunciation teaching in an attempt to outline major difficulties faced by learners and the causes behind them in order to address them within the pronunciation curriculum.
- It is clear that there is a burning need for coordination at all levels. It is recommended that there should be more conferences and meetings about pronunciation teaching to discuss a range of vital issues and seek solution for current problems.
- Content selection and gradation is a crucial stage in any syllabus design. What is presented to pupils should be the result of a profound study and understanding of the learning situation in order to assure effectiveness of the whole process.
- The use of suitable materials for teachers has a great impact on the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is highly recommended to furnish schools with necessary equipment like audio-visual labs that helps in using authentic English in lessons to enhance pupils' pronunciation level.
- For future studies, further research may be conducted with other instruments and take a larger sample of pupils for more valid and reliable results.



### **Limitation of the Study**

Although, some important results have been reached by the end of the current study, it is undeniable that several difficulties were confronted and which can be summarized as follows:

- The most prominent problem, which affected to some extent the process of collecting the data needed for the practical part, was the limited number of the participants involved in the study. A large sample could not be included since students were split into medium-sized groups of 15 pupils due to the current circumstances and health protocol which stood as an obstacle for doing more sessions to gain the most effective results.
- During the classroom observation, less amount of pronunciation was taught to pupils compared to the usual due to the diminishing of time (45 minutes) and the number of English sessions in the epidemic period.
- As regards the teachers' questionnaire, we could reach just 50 participants since most of them were very busy working on exams at that time. As a result, we could not manage to investigate more teachers' opinions.
- As a teacher working full time, it was really a big challenge for me to fulfill the research on time with two research instruments; however, I hoped I could conduct an experiment for more reliable findings.
- The last limitation which is really worth mentioning was the few number of available research literature on content selection in teaching pronunciation, so what is included in this study is comparatively limited, too.

### **General Conclusion**

English middle school teachers are not totally satisfied with the content delivered to their pupils in the current syllabus especially that of pronunciation. The present study is concerned with detecting the vowel sounds presented and the suitability of their gradation to pupils' level. This research included two main chapters. The first one is intended to demonstrate the relevant literature background of pronunciation learning and teaching in addition to researches related to content selection and gradation. The second chapter investigates pronunciation content through the use of two descriptive research tools.

In order to have an inclusive view of the field of interest, the first chapter was devoted to theoretical ideas and influential researches. There is a collective agreement on the significance of pronunciation in oral communication to reach intelligibility. Therefore, pronunciation learning and teaching is significant as well. However, the pronunciation content presented to pupils' should be selected and graded according to well defined criteria. All this should be done in harmony with prior set objectives, proficiency level and needs analysis.

In an attempt to strengthen our background thoughts of the research, an empirical survey was conducted and two research instruments were used. The teachers' questionnaire was held to seek the teachers' views about teaching pronunciation to third year middle school pupils, their level, and, more importantly, the pronunciation content selection and gradation. Classroom observation as a second tool assisted the researcher to get a closer vision on the suitability of the pronunciation content to the target group. After discussing the main obtained findings, our assumptions were strongly confirmed. Thus, we come to the conclusion that third year pupils encounter major difficulties in learning vowel pronunciation and the current syllabus failed to provide them with the necessary vowel sounds in a well-organized way.

In sum, content plays a crucial role in the success and effectiveness of the learning process, yet if it is well selected and graded to meet the pupils' level and needs.

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## Appendix: 01. Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire is a part of a research work. It aims at investigating the suitability of content gradation in teaching pronunciation for third year Middle School pupils. I would be grateful if you answered the following questions. Please, place a tick (✓) in the appropriate box(s) or make full statement whenever required.

Your answers will be valuable for this study. Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

### Part 1: Background Information

1-What is your academic degree?

a- Bachelor Degree  b- Master Degree  c- Graduating from ENS

2-How long have you been teaching English? .....year(s)

3-How long have you experienced teaching third year middle school pupils (**new generation**)? .....year(s)

### Part 2: - Pronunciation

4. Do you think teaching pronunciation is important for pupils? a- Yes

b- No

5. If yes, please say why?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

6. Do you consider teaching English pronunciation to middle school pupils a difficult teaching practice? a- Yes

b - No

7. If „yes“, what is the most difficult Pronunciation aspect(s) in teaching?

a- Consonants  b-Vowels  c-Silent letters







## Appendix: 02. Pronunciation tasks



I pronounce.

### a. I listen and repeat.

*/ə/* ➔ arithmetic – flamingo – Peru – sociable – never – manga

*/æ/* ➔ Africa – Andes – maths – fan – personality – Algeria

*/ɑː/* ➔ art – answer – plant – classmate – far – hard-working

### 1. Pronunciation of the vowel sounds */uː/* and */ʊ/*

#### a. I listen and repeat.

*/uː/* ➔ **ou**d – **sch**ool – **roo**m – **af**ternoon – **fo**od – **car**toon – **bo**ot – **Ju**ne – **fl**ute  
**ru**le – **fr**uit – **cr**ew – **int**erview – **bl**ue – **tr**ue – **sh**oe – **fl**u – **tw**o

*/ʊ/* ➔ **loo**k – **woo**d – **woo**l – **coo**k – **boo**k – **coo**kies – **chil**dhood – **goo**d  
**und**erstood – **foo**t – **too**k – **sho**uld – **cous**cous – **full** – **put** – **push**

#### b. I listen and repeat each pair

*/uː/*

**fo**ol  
**po**ol  
**fo**od  
**sto**ol  
**sui**t

*/ʊ/*

**fu**ll  
**pu**ll  
**fo**ot  
**sto**od  
**soo**t

b. I listen and repeat each pair.

| <i>/ɜ:/</i> | <i>/ɔ/</i> |
|-------------|------------|
| diverse     | divers     |
| chauffeuse  | chauffeur  |
| foreword    | forward    |
| dessert     | desert     |
| refer       | differ     |



2. Pronunciation of the vowel sounds */ɜ:/* and */ɔ/*

a. I listen and repeat.

*/ɜ:/* ➔ early – heard – learn – girl – birthday – bird – first – skirt – shirt – serve  
person – world – work – turn – burn – hurt – prefer – refer

*/ɔ/* ➔ about – again – alone – allowed – ago – potatoes – today – collar  
semolina – second – picture – shower – blazer – pizza – camera

**Task 3.** I listen and tick the correct pronunciation of the letters in bold.

| 1.    | <i>/u:/</i>              | <i>/ʊ/</i>               |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| tool  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| glue  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| shoot | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| shook | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| soup  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| new   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| flew  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| bull  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| 2.      | <i>/ɜ:/</i>              | <i>/ɔ/</i>               |
|---------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| stir    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| fur     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| across  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| above   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| urban   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| rural   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| actor   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### 3. Pronunciation of the vowel sounds /æ/, /ʌ/ and /e/

#### a. I listen and repeat.

/æ/ → actually – and – scrabble – grandma – began – national – casual – hat  
cap – family – gather – hamburger – salad – back – have – had – thank

/ʌ/ → uncle – us – mother – London – love – sometimes – come – mum – tub  
duck – fun – but – lucky – plus – stuffed – jumper – young

/e/ → every – elbow – then – project – very – chess – never – memory – beret  
leggings – vegetarian – breakfast – bread – head – friend – said

#### b. I listen and repeat each line.

/æ/

bat

bad

bag

pan

track

/ʌ/

but

bud

bug

pun

truck

/e/

bet

bed

beg

pen

trek

**Task 7.** I listen and write each of the following words in its corresponding column: rag, rug, sack, suck, head, had, sat, said, set, met, mat, mad, dead, dad, dud, red, fed, blood, bled, drag, drug, jump, lump, bump.

/æ/

.....rag.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

/ʌ/

.....rug.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

/e/

.....head.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Appendix: 03. Observation Checklist**

Date:.....

School: Brothers Fillali

Time:.....

Level: 3 MS

| Vowel<br>Sounds             | Question Statement  | Observation |    | Remarks |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------|----|---------|
|                             |   | Yes         | No |         |
| 1. /ə/<br>2. /æ/<br>3. /ɑ:/ | 1. Can they pronounce the vowel sound correctly?                      |             |    |         |
|                             | 2. Can they imitate the teacher's pronunciation?                      |             |    |         |
|                             | 3. Can they distinguish the link between the sound and its spelling?  |             |    |         |
| 4. /ʊ/<br>5. /u:/           | 4. Are they able to re-write the phonetic symbols by themselves?      |             |    |         |
| 6. /ə/<br>7. /ɜ:/           | 5. Can they classify new words according to vowel sound they contain? |             |    |         |
|                             | 6. Are they able to discriminate between similar sounds?              |             |    |         |
| 8. /æ/<br>9. /ʌ/<br>10. /e/ |   |             |    |         |

## Résumé

Développer une compétence communicative globale dans la langue cible exige d'améliorer la compétence des apprenants en matière de performance orale ainsi qu'un haut niveau de prononciation intelligible. En raison de ce rôle vital, la prononciation est incluse dans presque tous les programmes éducatifs. L'objectif de l'étude est d'étudier dans quelle mesure la gradation du contenu de la prononciation des voyelles convient aux élèves. La troisième année de collège a été utilisée comme une étude de cas; cinquante professeurs d'anglais et quinze élèves ont été délibérément échantillonnés. Parmi les problèmes, des déductions ont été faites pour formuler trois questions de recherche : (1) Les élèves éprouvent-ils des difficultés à apprendre la prononciation des voyelles anglaises? (2) Le contenu de la prononciation est-il bien choisi et noté pour répondre au niveau et aux besoins des élèves? (3) La gradation du contenu influence-t-elle la faiblesse de la prononciation des apprenants? démontre les antécédents de la littérature pertinente pour parvenir à une compréhension claire de ces problèmes et suggère certaines stratégies pédagogiques pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage prononciations. En outre, les théories dominantes liées à la sélection du contenu et à la gradation sont exposées. L'examen de la littérature montre le rôle influent que joue le contenu dans la fluidité et l'efficacité du processus d'apprentissage, bien sûr, s'il est bien sélectionné et noté pour répondre au niveau et aux besoins des élèves. Pour tenter de trouver des réponses aux questions de recherche, on opte pour une méthode descriptive et on utilise deux instruments, soit un questionnaire à l'intention des enseignants et une observation en classe. L'information recueillie lors de l'enquête empirique révèle généralement que la sélection et la gradation inappropriées du contenu affaiblissent le niveau de prononciation des élèves. En particulier, le programme actuel n'a pas fourni aux élèves de troisième année les sons de voyelles nécessaires dans un bien sélectionné et note .En particulier, le programme

actuel n'a pas fourni aux élèves de troisième année les sons de voyelles nécessaires dans un design bien sélectionné et noté.

Mots clés: prononciation, voyelles , sélection du contenu , gradation du contenu , convenance.

### الملخص

يتطلب تطوير الكفاءة العامة في مجال التواصل باللغة المستهدفة تعزيز كفاءة المتعلمين في الأداء الشفوي فضلا عن مستوى عال من النطق الواضح والجلي. ونظرا لهذا الدور المهم، فإن النطق تقريبا مدرج في جميع المناهج التعليمية. ويهدف البحث إلى دراسة مدى ملاءمة تدرج محتوى نطق اللفظ للتلاميذ. واستخدم البحث السنة الثالثة متوسط كحالة للدراسة؛ وتم أخذ عينات عبارة عن خمسين مدرسا من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية وخمسة عشر تلميذا. ومن خلال هذه المشاكل، تم التطرق لصياغة ثلاث أسئلة للبحث. (1) هل يواجه التلاميذ صعوبات في تعلم النطق. (2) هل تم اختيار و ادراج دروس النطق بطريقة تتناسب مع مستوى و احتياجات التلاميذ. (3) هل طريقة ادراج الدروس تأثر على عملية تعلم التلاميذ للنطق. في البداية، تم ادراج الدراسة الأدبية المرتبطة بالبحث للتوصل إلى فهم واضح لهذه المشاكل واقترح بعض الاستراتيجيات التربوية لتعليم وتعلم النطق. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم ذكر النظريات السائدة المتعلقة باختيار المحتوى والتدرج. و يبين القسم النظري لهذه الدراسة الدور المؤثر الذي يلعبه المحتوى في سلاسة وفعالية عملية التعلم، إذا تم اختياره بشكل جيد وتصنيفه لتلبية مستوى التلاميذ و احتياجاتهم. و من اجل إيجاد إجابات لأسئلة البحث، تم اختيار طريقة وصفية واستخدام أداتان للبحث، وهما استبيان المعلمين وملاحظة الفصول الدراسية. و تكشف المعلومات المجمعة من الدراسة التجريبية بوجه عام أن اختيار المحتوى وتدرجه على نحو غير ملائم يضعفان مستوى التلاميذ في النطق. و على وجه الخصوص، فشل المنهج الحالي في تزويد تلاميذ السنة الثالثة بالأصوات اللازمة في صورة مختارة ومتدرجة جيدا.

الكلمات الرئيسية: النطق، اللفظ، انتقاء المحتوى، تدرج المحتوى، الملائمة