

Improving pronunciation of -S ending in an Ecuadorian EFL class

Melhorando a pronúncia da terminação -S em uma classe de inglês como língua estrangeira no Equador

Mejorando la pronunciación de la terminación -S en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador

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Abstract

This research aims to improve students' pronunciation of the -S ending sound in a group of twenty-one EFL learners from a private high school on the Ecuadorian coast where the pronunciation of the -s ending appears weak on them. By using PRAAT computer software and exploring whether, after using it, their pronunciation had improved; To answer this question, we present to students the specific grammar aspect of /z/ /iz/ /s/ English pronunciation, recorded sounds with complete sentences, verbs and nouns from a native English speaker is used to help students to analyze their pronunciation as the native speaker does by using this software. The final results demonstrated that some learners improved their pronunciation of the -S ending sounds, yet others did not; students concerned about their English proficiency improved compared to the ones with low proficiency levels. The study suggests using technological tools to teach and learn pronunciation, as some students do not like to learn a second language. Teachers must apply their curriculum to teach pronunciation with the help of technological tools.

Keywords: Pronunciation; PRAAT; Technological tools; -S ending; Ecuador.

Resumo

Esta investigação tem como objetivo melhorar a pronúncia dos estudantes da terminação -S em um grupo de veias estudantes de EFL de uma escola secundária privada na costa equatoriana onde a pronúncia da terminação -s parece débil. Mediante o uso do software informático PRAAT e explorando si, após usá-lo, sua pronúncia foi melhorada; Para responder a esta pergunta, apresentamos aos estudantes o aspecto gramatical específico da pronúncia em inglês de /z/ /iz/ /s/, que utilizamos sons gravados com orações completas, verbos e substantivos de uma palavra nativa de inglês para ajudar a os estudantes analisam sua pronúncia como fazem a palavra nativa ao usar este software. Os resultados finais demonstraram que alguns ex-alunos melhoraram a pronúncia dos sons finais -S, mas outros não; Os estudantes preocupados com o domínio do inglês melhoraram em comparação com os que tinham níveis de domínio mais baixos. O estúdio sugere usar ferramentas tecnológicas para aprender e aprender a pronúncia, já que alguns estudantes não gostam de aprender um segundo idioma. Os professores devem aplicar seu plano de estudos para aprender a pronúncia com ajuda de ferramentas tecnológicas.

Palabras-clave: Pronúncia; PRAT; Ferramentas tecnológicas; Terminação -S; Equador.

Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo mejorar la pronunciación de los estudiantes de la terminación -S en un grupo de veintiún estudiantes de EFL de una escuela secundaria privada en la costa ecuatoriana donde la pronunciación de la terminación -s les parece débil. Mediante el uso del software informático PRAAT y explorando si, después de usarlo, su pronunciación había mejorado; Para responder a esta pregunta, presentamos a los estudiantes el aspecto gramatical específico de la pronunciación en inglés de /z/ /iz/ /s/, se utilizan sonidos grabados con oraciones completas, verbos y substantivos de un hablante nativo de inglés para ayudar a los estudiantes a analizar su pronunciación como lo hace el hablante nativo al usar este software. Los resultados finales demostraron que algunos alumnos mejoraron su pronunciación de los sonidos finales -S, pero otros no; los estudiantes preocupados por su dominio del inglés mejoraron en comparación con los que tenían niveles bajos de dominio. El estudio sugiere utilizar herramientas tecnológicas para enseñar y aprender la

pronunciación, ya que a algunos estudiantes no les gusta aprender un segundo idioma. Los docentes deben aplicar su plan de estudios para enseñar pronunciación con la ayuda de herramientas tecnológicas.

Palabras clave: Pronunciación; PRAAT; Herramientas tecnológicas; Terminación -S; Ecuador.

1. Introduction

Teaching Pronunciation is challenging, especially when teaching or learning pronunciation instruments are lacking. Hayati (2010) pointed out that using technology tools while Pronunciation is developing this method aid student in reaching their goal. Nevertheless, according to Gilakjani (2017), English teachers lack time and competence in pronunciation teaching in class using technological tools, and educators are not always well prepared to utilize them.

Therefore is not far from the reality in this school; the lack of use of those tools is missing. Thus, improving the Pronunciation of the -S could be challenging, especially if students do not see the difference between the three -S ending sounds in English.

It is crucial to note that just though some learners have a superior understanding of English does not guarantee they have proper Pronunciation. Observations in this private school located in Manabí province, Ecuador, report that some students produce the coda -s when they speak Spanish, even rugged in English as foreign language (EFL) class, they keep producing the weak of the -s ending. Escalante (2018) researched a group of students on the coast of Ecuador whose -s ending sound appears weak. In this school, some EFL students do not necessarily consider learning the deep Pronunciation of the -s ending as long they can communicate with each other in a foreign language and native speakers can understand them. However, it is essential when a standard English-level certificate is vital in that case. Therefore the challenge is to enhance their _S ending sound Pronunciation in this group of EFL learners. In brief, according to Pourhosein and Sabouri (2017), Pronunciation is one of the most challenging abilities to master and teach in a language. As PRAAT is a tool, several studies suggest this software works for improving Pronunciation. Other researchers have done an excellent job, and the results appear adequate. Boersma and Weenink (1992) PRAAT successfully implemented in EFL classes in Italy (Brett, 2004), Japan (Wilson, 2008), Korea (Yoon, 2007), Hawaii-USA (Le & Brook, 2011), Iran (Gorjian et al., 2013). Algeria (Hamlaoui & Bengrait, 2016) and Indonesia (Triassanti, 2015) cited in (Osatananda & Thinchin, 2021, p. 373). Thus, This study contemplates teaching pronunciation on the -S ending in this group by using recorded native English speaker sounds and analysing them using a free software program called PRAAT, available online. Consequently, the following research question dressed in this experimental study: Can the systematic use of PRAAT improve the Pronunciation of the -S ending sounds of a group of EFL students in an Ecuadorian High School?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronunciation

The success of better communication depends on pronunciation; the meaning of messages sent throughout will be lost or misunderstood without proper pronunciation. (Bui et al., 2021) So having the best understanding while pronouncing in the target language is essential. Additionally, according to the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, pronunciation refers to a word or letter uttered, how it is said correctly, or how a language is spoken. O'Neal (2015) suggested that if speakers say a word or express their ideas, but the listeners cannot grasp the pronunciation, the pronunciation is difficult for them to understand. Cited in (Bui et al., 2021)

On the other hand, the pronunciation of -s ending in this group of students may not be that important for them as long as they communicate accurately with non-native English speakers. According to recent data from the (EF EPI) English Proficiency Index 2019 in Ecuador, our country is experiencing a significant problem, a large number of persons with a low level of English in the region. As a result of living in a nation where English is not traditionally used, and there are no individuals who use it for general communication, an individual's pronunciation may reflect the disparity between their original language and English. Additionally, the English pronunciation that is understood in your native nation may not be understood in another. (Chappell & Kanwit, 2022)

2.2 The Importance of Pronunciation

All English learners must know that pronunciation is an essential skill they must practice to improve their English. By developing this part of speaking skills, students can ensure they are understood when communicating.

Szyska (2016). It was mentioned that accurate pronunciation is essential in verbal communication. Learners who use proper pronunciation and intonation are more likely to communicate effectively. When small vocabulary and grammatical errors. The third person singular - S is considered one of the most accessible English grammatical topics to grasp. Therefore, pronunciation should not take for granted in EFL classes (Picón & Laura 2015, p. 5).

On the other hand, Gilakjani (2012) mentioned that the teacher's role plays an essential aspect in the instructions of the pronunciation process while learning pronunciation through the use of technology. The instruction must be explicit, and the aptitude of the tutor is an essential point in students' perception; the impression that the tutor would produce on learners is also considered important; it does not just consist of having all the necessary technological tools to implement in class, it also consists in the aptitude that teacher must develop in the process of teaching English pronunciation on learners to gain the purpose on students. Farhat and Dzakiria (2017) said that "pronunciation teaching increases EFL/ESL learners' oral productivity." cited in (Gilakjani, 2017, p. 1250). Using software could present an advantage in teaching pronunciation. Intrinsic motivation plays an essential role in the process of learning EFL. Lipski (2005). Mentioned that "Coda /s/ reduction among L1 Spanish speakers occurs in nearly 50% of the Spanish-speaking globe, including the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and southern Spain," according to a study (Chappell & Kanwit, 2022, p.189). Thus, it The important to using technological tools to enhance the pronunciation of the -S ending in this group of learners where their -s appear weak when they pronounce it. Introducing a new method to improve pronunciation could engage our students to use PRAAT as a technological tool to learn the pronunciation of the final /s/ /iz/ /z/ sound. Seferoğlu (2005) stated that having software programs instead of traditional methods has better post-test results when teaching and learning pronunciation. For this reason, whether technology has planned to be used to teach pronunciation, English teachers must apply to the curriculum the advantage of using software programs to improve pronunciation, among other skills.

In summary, according to Muslimah (2013), one factor that defines someone's capacity to interact successfully with others is the ability to pronounce the -s ending sound correctly.

2.3 Technological tools in EFL

To gain output in learning EFL, as is supported by (Miltra, 2003). Defined that children aged between (8-13 years old) can manage computers and other activities related to technological tools. Whereby admit this vital aspect, students after elementary can quickly start learning to use tech tools that will aid them in improving pronunciation in EFL. Student involvement is one factor that influences the academic advancement of a pupil, cognitive growth, as well as educational qualities, according to earlier studies. (Teng & Wang 2021). Therefore, A more profound knowledge of how instructional technology influences student involvement has been

expressed. The use of learning technology is an important concept that should be integrated into student involvement to improve teaching techniques and student outcomes. Student engagement has been described from three perspectives: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement. (Fredricks et al., 2004, 2016). According to (Hayati, 2010). The use of technology or computers is one of the good ways to improve pronunciation teaching and learning. Thus, using it appropriately in class with learners definitely will be an advantage for learners to improve pronunciation of the -S ending sounds.

2.4 Goals Using Technological tools

Levis (2007) Determined that technology tools should use in conjunction with instructional pedagogy to teach pronunciation.

Like this software program, PRAAT should be founded on the straightforward theoretical approach to teaching EFL, focused on pronouncing words correctly. Apps or software are still needed and will be needed to aid students in pronouncing /s/ /iz/ /z/.

Pronunciation instructions have divided into two overlapping and antagonistic focuses a focus on accuracy instruction in all possible aspects of pronunciation, with little attempt to prioritise attention, and a focus on intelligibility, which involves instruction for only the elements of pronunciation that are critical for communicative success, while ignoring or deemphasising those that are not. Pronunciation instruction has traditionally concentrated on the accuracy, presuming that all feasible vowel and consonant sounds in the target language are necessary for teaching. This comprehensive coverage not only increases the teaching and learning burden but there is no evidence that such accuracy is feasible or desirable for most learners. All pronunciation faults do not have the same effect on listeners. (Levis, 2005) Therefore as long as to communicate in the same context, students will not face any problems. However, if we plan to get a standard English level overlapping with some researchers, we must improve this critical grammar aspect.

Intelligibility relates to whether or not listeners can appropriately comprehend the words uttered by a speaker in context. As a result, It is vital that students learning English for international communication learn to speak it as clearly and understandably as possible - not necessarily like native speakers, but well enough to be understood.

Comprehensibility refers to whether or not listeners comprehend (or feel they grasp) a speaker's message (Levis, 2007).

Fraser (2000) mentioned that researchers should not emphasise the significance of teaching pronunciation but instead on the methodology used in class to teach pronunciation. Therefore, before including technological tools in their planning to teach pronunciation to their students, teachers must focus on how they will use these tools to know exactly when and how to use them according to what requires in the group of learners. The instructions from teachers also are vital to address the group of learners in these activities that will lead them to the aim of pronouncing words correctly in English. Thus, Students must be well prepared the use these tools to work on them outside class; a student that tries to achieve his or her goals in learning a second language but at a standard level must be aware that this is a crucial aspect to consider in order to improve and able to talk in a better way to listeners.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This free program, PRAAT, is valuable software material for improving pronunciation in EFL learners. Georgian et al. (2013). Made a test and proved the effectiveness in improving pronunciation in their students; it shows to be one best option together with the recorded audio from native English speakers, where students can listen and repeat their pronunciation to enhance theirs (Osatananda, & Thinchana, 2021).

3.2 Instruments

Recorded MP3 sample audios from the native speakers have been given to improve the -S ending sound.

A questionnaire had created to collect their opinions in a driver file for the student before and after the experiment with PRAAT. Moreover, recorded audio from nouns and verbs was collected from students to revise before and after the experiment.

The software program called PRAAT is installed on their computer.

Table 1 - Words and sentences given to students for the post and pre-test.

-S ending pronunciation.	Words	Sentence
Buzzing Sounds /iz/	Closes Pushes	She pushes and closes the door.
Voiced Sounds /z/	Owens Dogs	He owns dogs
Voiceless Sounds /s/	Likes Sports	She likes Sports.
Pre-Test		

Source: Moncayo (2023).

3.3 Participants

This study was done from January 3rd till March 18th of 2022 in a group of 21 students from 8th grade between 12- 13 years of age, Thirteen girls and eight boys; their English proficiency was A1 based on the Common European Framework (CEFR) Because of the ongoing pandemic (Covid-19), classes were online, 3 hours per week using the Zoom app.

This study adhered to the ethical concerns processes (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). The researcher asked permission to get the data collected from the students in the pre-and post-test; the objective of the experiment was explained to the students before the procedure started, and it was stated that the information gathered would be utilised in future research and would be published.

3.4 Procedure

Week #1, Day #1.

Students met online for the English class, and the activity showed students the three different sounds /s/ /z/ /iz/ through a PowerPoint presentation (PPP), where the different sounds on the final -s, appear and compared voiceless and voiced sounds as well.

The topic was precise from the beginning of the lesson, with three different -s ending sounds. From the start, students filled up a survey form in a drive to know how much they knew about the topic of the three different sounds and the software program PRAAT. Students were from eighth grade, which is the beginning of high school in Ecuador. Therefore it was new to them what the topic and the software were; nevertheless, they were enthusiastic about learning something they did not know existed.

After it, students practised with the researcher the pronunciation of words ending with the /s/ ending sound after the perception occurred. Students recorded the voiceless sounds with two English words, *likes & sports* and the sentence *she likes sports*; they recorded their audio and sent it to the researcher through WhatsApp to convert into Mp3 to analyse and compare with NS audios using PRAAT.

Day #2 & 3

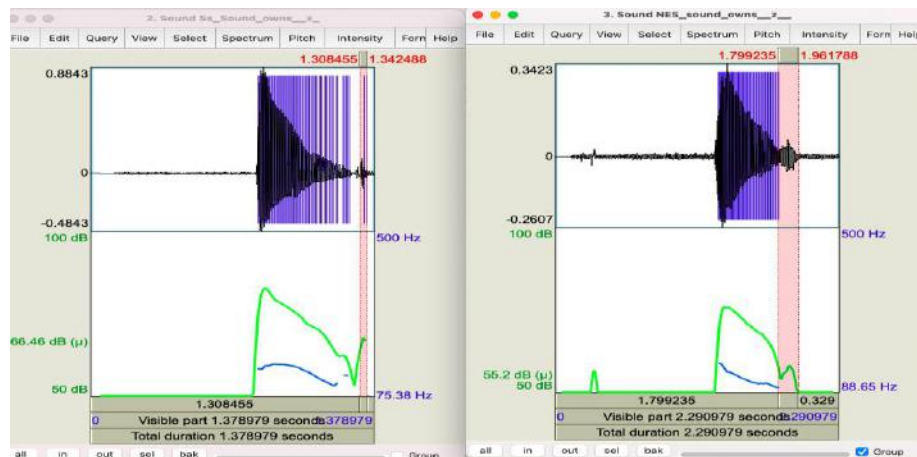
In this lesson, they learnt about the ending sounds of /z/ and /iz/ students' perception; thus, they had the recorded audio to send through Whatsapp. The words given to them this time were *Dogs, Owns*, and the sentence *he owns dogs*

Pushes, closes, and the sentence she pushes and closes the door. Students recorded their audio and sent it to the tutor through WhatsApp to convert into Mp3 to analyse and compare with NS audios using Praat.

Week #2. Day # 1, 2 & 3.

Every lesson was taken on mornings at the beginning of the online class as a warm-up activity of reflection to demonstrate to learners how vital pronunciation is when standard English refers. The videos were taken from YouTube. This day the lesson took more than an hour because students needed to download the PRAAT software to their computers. Students downloaded and installed PRAAT on their computers after sharing the link through the zoom chat to start doing it. After a profound explanation from the tutor to demonstrate how the software program works to analyse pronunciation, students shared their screens to ensure they knew how the program worked. A pre-test consists of collecting recorded audio from this group of EFL learners. Students needed to record their audio by repeating it after listening to the native English speaker sample (NES). The lack of appropriate pronunciation appears in learners in comparison with the ones native. Thus, the analysis of students' audio in PRAAT software in decibels (dB).

Figure 1 - The Word owns /z/ in the student pre-test compared to NES audio.



Ss Sound: Own /z/ 66.46 dB NES Sound: Own /z/ 55.2 dB.

Source: Moncayo (2023).

After the perception students had from the explanation of three different -S ending sounds, it has achieved by using this program. With the generated pitch and intensities graphs, students see the differences in one another's pronunciation before they start to use PRAAT more in-depth.

Week #3. Day # 1, 2 & 3.

Students needed to record their audio by using PRAAT and selecting the option WAV file, which is in the software program, for saving it on their computer to compare their audio with the ones from native English speakers. At this point, learners had the sample audios, and they tried again to improve their pronunciation of /s/ /z/ /iz/ by sharing their screen; they demonstrated that the improvement was noticeable using PRAAT.

Week #4, 5, 6, 7.

The following weeks were the start of the phase of self-training. Students were encouraged to practice at home with some MP3 audio verbs recorded and given by the tutor.

After students had sent their audios using PRAAT, a break time came across. We came back after several weeks, and the aim was to demonstrate if the perception from different -s ending sounds /z/ /s/ /iz/ still focused students when and how to pronounce according to what they had learned in pronunciation.

The students have done a post-test with the same samples as in the pre-test to see differences in those three different -S ending sounds.

The purpose was to determine whether students can unconsciously way recognise when a buzzing, voiceless or voiced sound is.

Week #8, 9, 10.

The researcher wanted to ensure that students knew how to manage the software program besides could add the Mp3 audio from a native sample to analyse with their own recorded sound.

The students had more audio from native English speakers delivered by the tutor in Mp3 through the zoom chat in the app.

Therefore, the student needed to share the computer screen to ensure they knew how to manage the software to analyse their pronunciation.

Week # 11.

A student recorded a video using the zoom app to let know that they knew how to use PRAAT to aid the pronunciation of the -S end.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Pre and Post-Test

The researcher used the software program PRAAT to analyse by selecting in Decibels the differences between students' and native speakers' audio in the -S ending sounds. The words and sentences are the same as in the preliminary and post-test; the pre-test collected the audio from students before they started using PRAAT. It was just the learner's perception after the input from the tutor. And the post-test was by trying till the students reached better pronunciation in this grammar aspect.

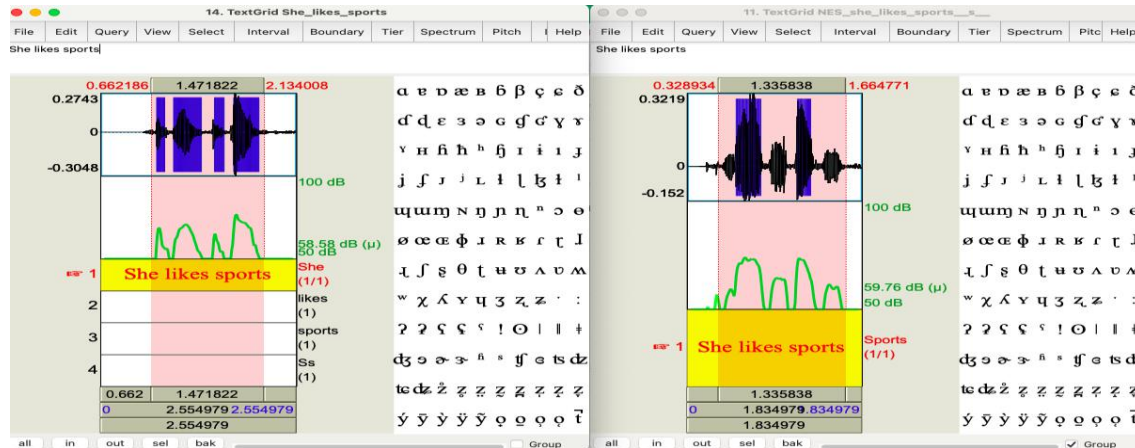
Additionally, the Jamovi statistics program was used for subsequent statistical analysis. This analysis was done to see if there were any significant variations in comparison to the pre-and post-test in decibel values, to revise how many students were still weak s ending sounds than others.

Yet to do this, the authors needed to give a score to the best the close they were to the native audio sample; the maximum mark was ten. The evaluation was done after analysing all recorded audio English as foreign language (EFL) learners sent after using PRAAT.

5. Results and Discussions

As Chen (2022) mentioned, using computer-assisted is an excellent aid for improving pronunciation by using the program's features to analyze and see your errors from the production. As was expected, learners' pronunciation rose after using PRAAT, yet some students did not. In figure 2, we can see that after the explanation from the tutor, the students' decibels were still not that close to as native English sample (NES) measure done in dB. Yet it had improved.

Figure 2 - The sentence She likes sports in the student post-test 58.58 dB compared to NES audio 59.76 dB.



St sound: She likes sports 58.58 dB NES: She likes sports 59.76 dB.

Source: Moncayo (2023).

Table 2 below demonstrates how many students have improved their pronunciation of the -s ending sound with the perception and the aid of PRAAT in all the verbs and nouns given to learners.

Table 2 - Student's improvement is compared pre and post-test in all results; scores are given over a grade of ten.

	N	Mean	SE	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test dB	21	6.67	0.174	7.00	0.796	5.00	7.50
Post-test dB	21	7.31	0.187	7.50	0.858	5.50	8.50

N= Sample; M= mean; Sd= Standard deviation. Source: Moncayo (2023).

The results indicate that the group of students immersed in the experiment for improving pronunciation of the -s ending sound had improved after the explanation students had and improving pronunciation using the software.

Accordingly, Gass et al., (2005) mentioned that a good experiment involves analyzing the perception and the production; therefore, this study implies seeing how students perceive their pronunciation had improved after using PRAAT. Gorjian et al., (2013) did a study where the results were satisfactory using PRAAT with their students, yet in that study, the purpose was to focus on stress and intonation; besides, he mentioned that the lack of teaching pronunciation using technological tools is missing in the classroom, or EFL teachers do not focus on it while they are in the classroom, it is just teacher centred and students sitting and

listening, as is not that far from reality in schools in Ecuador especially public schools were the lack of the use of software programs to teach pronunciation are also missing.

As most of the students from this group of twenty-one, they didn't know that three different sounds on the final -s existed. Thus, it seems to be that pronunciation is not even applied well in classrooms or just a bit in curriculum planning.

Nobody will do it if teachers do not communicate the main norms and principles of understandable pronunciation to their EFL students. It is the role of EFL teachers to achieve this by teaching new sounds, words, sentences, and phrases in their EFL classrooms and providing adequate resources for acceptable pronunciation. EFL teachers should investigate novel methods of showing, practising, and providing feedback on English pronunciation that are suited for students to acquire English pronunciation quickly and efficiently (Gilakjani & Sabouri 2016)

Many teachers dislike teaching English pronunciation to their students for various reasons. According to Kelly (2000), there are two fundamental reasons teachers ignore English pronunciation. The first cause is a lack of enthusiasm for teaching pronunciation. The second problem relates to the teachers' lack of pronouncing skills, cited in (Gilakjani & Sabouri 2016, p.197)

6. Final Considerations

The literature review introducing this paper stated that pronunciation is one the most difficult parts to teach and learn, especially when technological tools are absent. Therefore, the - S ending sounds are not apart from it. Even though it is not vital to sound on voiceless or voiced sounds when pronouncing the -s in the target language, as students did not have pronunciation classes before using a software program to improve their pronunciation, as a survey in drive demonstrated, see Figure 3; using PRAAT was satisfactory in improving their pronunciation. Technological tools seem absent from lesson plans at the beginning of the academic year. Having them from the beginner will be advantageous in better pronouncing this grammar structure when they grow. However, using this technological tool can improve the final s- ending sound in their pronunciation; for future researchers, it could be satisfactory to revise whether this proper pronunciation has improved after a long time.

Figure 3 - Demonstrate a survey on students after they know the three differences from -s ending sounds they believe that PRAAT will help them with better pronunciation.

Translate from Spanish. [Do you believe your pronunciation will improve on /s/ /z/ /iz/ -s ending sounds after meeting PRAAT? 21 answers on yes.]



Source: Moncayo (2023).

Students agreed to have future English teachers use technological tools more often to improve their pronunciation. And most students were confident in managing the software after several weeks of the PRAAT training sections.

6.1 Limitations

Some socio-economic factors affected the process; few students did not have a computer in their home, others needed to wait for their parents to return home after work to use the computer and few of the students connected by a mobile device. Despite the difficulties, many students managed to download and install the software.

As mentioned earlier, the sample was composed of 21 students from 8 grade, aged twelve to thirteen, divided into 13 girls and eight boys in a private school in Manabí - Ecuador.

The results demonstrate that through this software, the pronunciation of –S ending sounds in this group of students has improved after using PRAAT; moreover, the perception they acquired after knowing the three different -s ending sounds was successful for them to understand from an early age.

Engage students in this activity was not easy as some students were alone from home because the classes were online and not on campus; due to the pandemic COVID-19, moreover, some students do not like to speak a second language, and some of them demonstrated a lack of confidence or careless in this grammar structure. Therefore, a recommendation from the authors is that future research can extend the period to analyze pronunciation of the -s ending sounds after several months to release if, in a natural context, students get used to the correct pronunciation to check with other verbs and nouns using PRAAT. If they engage with the correct pronunciation of -s, they will be lost in time if they do not practice. Nevertheless, this experiment requires more time to analyze their pronunciation better after several weeks or months.

Pronunciation helps students have a clear and better understanding when talking with others, and it allows learners to improve other English competencies effectively (Bui et al., 2021). Standardizing English in schools and developing correct pronunciation early to reach EFL class goals with learners is essential.

The aptitude of teachers for learners, while they are teaching, should be positive and well developed in their lessons and activities to create a good atmosphere between both sides, who teaches and who learns. Sometimes the aptitude of students is not as high as we expected due to the fact some of the students do not like to know the English language.

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