

The use of pronunciation games to teach English diphthongs in an explicit way

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Abstract

In order to contribute with evidences to the English pronunciation teaching area, this paper proposes a set of games to work on a concrete pronunciation aspect, the diphthongs. Three groups of 6th grade of primary education students in a Catalan school context participated in two tests, carried out before and after the games exposure, in order to define the participants' improvement in this specific foreign language learning field. The mentioned exposure was carried out throughout a month of the academical year. In order to contribute to the English pronunciation teaching area, three different English teachers were interviewed to provide evidence of the stated outcomes. Results show that receiving an explicit exposure to diphthong recognition and pronunciation through games has positive outcomes in a short term exposure. Testing the recognition of diphthongs has been carried out through several "odd one out" sets, which showed a considerable improvement in the final test performance. The visible differences between the before and after results point out the benefits of introducing games to work explicitly the English pronunciation, although no relevant improvements in reading the target diphthongs were detected. Findings seem to suggest the benefits in short term diphthong recognition, but more favourable results in reading performance might be perceptible with longer exposure.

Key words: Diphthong, games, primary education, English pronunciation

Resum

Per tal de contribuir amb evidències a l'àrea de l'ensenyament de pronúncia anglesa, aquest article proposa una col·lecció de jocs amb els quals s'ha treballat un aspecte concret de la pronúncia anglesa, els diftongs. Tres grups de 6è d'educació primària d'una escola catalana van participar en dos tests, administrats abans i després de ser exposats als jocs, per determinar la millora dels participants en aquest camp específic de l'aprenentatge d'una llengua estrangera. L'esmentada exposició va ésser assolida al llarg d'un mes de l'any acadèmic. Per tal de contribuir a l'àrea de l'ensenyament de pronúncia anglesa, tres mestres d'anglès van ésser entrevistats per aportar evidències dels resultats enunciats. Els resultats mostren que rebent una exposició explícita al reconeixement i pronúncia de diftongs a través de jocs té efectes positius en un curt termini d'exposició. Les proves de reconeixement dels diftongs es van dur a terme a partir de diferents col·leccions d'"odd one out", les quals varen mostrar una millora rellevant en l'acompliment del test final. Les diferències entre els resultats de l'abans i el després senyalen els beneficis de la introducció de jocs per treballar explícitament la pronúncia anglesa, tot i que no s'han detectat millores rellevants en la lectura dels diftongs especificats. Els resultats semblen suggerir els beneficis en el reconeixement de diftongs a curt termini, però una millora en l'acompliment de la lectura podria ser perceptible amb una exposició més extensa.

Paraules clau: Diftongs, jocs, educació primària, pronúncia anglesa

Resumen

Para contribuir con evidencias en el área de la enseñanza de pronunciación inglesa, este artículo propone una colección de juegos con los cuales se ha trabajado un aspecto concreto de la pronunciación inglesa, los diptongos. Tres grupos de 6º de educación primaria de una escuela catalana participaron en dos tests, administrados antes y después de ser expuestos a los juegos, para determinar la mejora de los participantes en este campo específico del aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. La mencionada exposición fue llevada a cabo a lo largo de un mes del año académico. Para contribuir al área de la enseñanza de pronunciación inglesa, tres maestros de inglés fueron entrevistados para aportar evidencias de los resultados enunciados. Los resultados

muestran que recibiendo una exposición explícita sobre el reconocimiento y pronunciación de diptongos a través de juegos tiene efectos positivos en un corto plazo de exposición. Las pruebas de reconocimiento de los diptongos se llevaron a cabo a partir de diferentes colecciones de “odd one out”, los cuales mostraron una mejora relevante en el desempeño del test final. Las visibles diferencias entre los resultados del antes y el después señalan los beneficios de la introducción de juegos para trabajar explícitamente la pronunciación inglesa, a pesar de que no se detectaron mejoras relevantes en la lectura de los diptongos especificados. Los resultados parecen sugerir los beneficios en el reconocimiento de diptongos a corto plazo, pero una millar en el desempeño de la lectura podría ser perceptible con una exposición más extensa.

Palabras clave: Diptongos, juegos, educación primaria, pronuncia inglesa

1. Pronunciation teaching

The two transversal axis that define this study are: the role of educational games and phonetic training. The relationship between these two concepts will be the guideline throughout the study. In the first place, English pronunciation teaching will be analysed through previous research, followed by an explanation of how games can help, particularly in foreign language learning, and afterwards, the specific phonetic aspects that this study will be focused on will be presented.

Foreign language learning has withstood through different stages, where it has been taught in a vast number of approaches, and so has happened to English pronunciation teaching. Some case studies, such as Tergujeff (2012) and Akyol (2013), identify different strategies that are used in primary education English classes to teach pronunciation. In the first one, the strategies used by Finland teachers were really traditional, as the most common was to listen and repeat (Tergujeff, 2012). However, in the second case, the most common method used by English teachers was creating songs and rhymes to remember the targeted pronunciation (Akyol, 2013). Whereas some cases are more focused on the advantages of segmental features, that is to say, concrete phonemes, in others the core elements are the suprasegmental features, such as the word stress and intonation. As it is shown in Sadat-Tehrani's (2017) case study, pronunciation teaching is something that has to be taught explicitly, and its instruction appears to be more helpful for students' intelligibility (Sadat-tehrani, 2017). Shah, Ohman and Seom (2017) also defended the same with this statement: "teaching pronunciation should go beyond just teaching the phonemes" (Shah, Othman and Senom, 2017, p.194), and they also added through their research that in the Malaysian context, English pronunciation was not taught explicitly and this caused a negligence in this field (Shah, Othman and Senom, 2017). This lack of explicitness in pronunciation teaching is what differentiates the intuitive-imitative from the analytic-linguistic approach. Therefore, the authors defend the need to not rely on learner's ability to listen and imitate (intuitive-imitative approach), but to emphasise on those sounds that need to be learnt (analytic-linguistic

approach) (Hashemian and Fadaei, 2011). In consequence, songs and rhymes are a good support for students to receive pronunciation input, because it is a resource to receive some pronunciation input, but those need to be the pretext to go further in this field and introduce resources to make pronunciation aspects visible. For these reasons, the current study includes educational games, in which pronunciation is taught explicitly through four different diphthong types, getting close to the analytic-linguistic approach, but also taking advantage of the positive aspects that games and rhymes can provide to students' learning in a more implicit way.

Along the same lines, according to Yunus et al. (2016) there are three types of activities in pronunciation teaching: controlled activities, guided activities and free activities. Controlled activities could be associated with the traditional objectives, which involves carrying out explanations, practices and testing. Guided activities could be associated to learning through feedback, and finally, free activities are linked to games, dramatisations and discussions. However, as it is explained in the article, although every teacher knew about the variety of activities, their classes were limited to controlled techniques (Yunus et. al., 2016). In contrast, studies affirm that guided and free activities improve the pronunciation development in the L2 (Saito and Lyster, 2011), making students' learning meaningful and brimful of feedback. Altogether, it is possible to conclude that English teachers have insufficient training or opportunities in this area (Breikreutz and Derwing, 2001), since English pronunciation teachers are aware of its training importance, but few of them bring into practice this reflections.

English pronunciation teaching is certainly a controversial field, in which teacher's background and beliefs influence their practice in class. Other examples, such as Wahid and Sulong (2013), explain that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and practices in this field and the studies, making visible the need for connection between investigations and the real context of the schools, indeed making possible the application of real and explicit pronunciation instruction in the classrooms.

1.1. Games in foreign language learning

Educational games have always been a good ally for foreign language teachers. Playing for learning purposes is a resource that makes children enjoy while they are acquiring and absorbing the intrinsic knowledge of the game, because the main basis of games is to amuse its players. As Cheng and Su (2011) state: “the educational game makes the learner become the centre of learning, which allows the learning process to be easier, more interesting and more effective” (p. 670). Games are the resource that involves each and every single child, taking part actively of them and making them interact as much with other children as with their surroundings. The interaction that is implicit in games, either with mates or with the game itself, is what enriches exponentially the students’ learning process.

Phonetic training for foreign language learners is usually an arduous task. It is mostly worked out of context, as when teachers focus on “what” and not on “how” they teach, and students do not follow a natural path on their learning, since they are not applying the knowledge in any real situation. Educational games can support this lack of usefulness that consistently affects English lessons, because what is enjoyed is easily learnt (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1990). Thus, including an assortment of games into the class can add genuineness to the students’ learning, applying what they learned in a contextualised situation, with an aim and having a goal.

Including games in the learning process of the students does have positive consequences, and this also includes primary education students. For instance, Johnson et al. (2005) claim that “the fun element helps maintain learner interest and positive attitude, and promotes intrinsic motivation” (p. 311). Keeping children motivated is the way to enhance their relation with themselves, with what surrounds them, and with everything they are involved in. The motivation concept is divided into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The definition is provided by Noels et al. (2000), in which the differences of both concepts are exposed. On the one hand, “intrinsic

motivation generally refers to motivation to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying to do” (p. 38). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is defined by the objective of receiving a reward as a consequence of doing what was requested, not for a personal objective of self-accomplishment (Noels et al., 2000). Both kinds of motivation can be related to games, as all children participate in them, either for the pleasure of playing or to receive a reward after their participation. This study aims to take advantage of games: creating different games and applying them in class, in order to promote students’ meaningful learning and intrinsic motivation to achieve the objective, and at the same time, giving the opportunity to English teachers to have a resource to include pronunciation teaching in their lessons. Therefore, with those opportunities to learn and practice through games, their motivation and learning is hoped to go forward in English pronunciation features.

Educational games do not only motivate students for the resource’s format, that is to say, the enjoyment of the experience of playing while learning, but also for the unlimited range of contents that can be worked through them. This means that learning while playing is not only a good format to captivate children’s attention, but to establish a bridge to connect the enjoyment with nourishing their capacities and abilities to teach and learn. Games help students and teachers through the educational path, from its planning to its application, they enhance the teaching and learning process. Inasmuch as games is referred, playing them grants the inclusion of students into the educative context, in which the environment provides helping each other making everyone learn. Sørensen and Meyer (2007) defend this view with this condition: “if games are generally seen as a framework for providing a meaningful context for language acquisition then games should be understood as significant models for the design of educational material for language teaching and learning” (p. 561). Games are learning precedents that teachers have to include as their educational ally, and not only as a disconnection of the passive lessons in their leisure time.

In sum, games do not only have a fun element that will always be related to a meaningful way of learning (Johnson et al., 2005; Sørensen and Meyer, 2007), but they also increase the learning acquisition of students, making this process more successful (Cheng and Su, 2011).

1.2. Pronunciation

The grapheme-phoneme relation in English language is the second focus of this study. It refers to different aspects of English language learning that differ from the native language of the students of this study. One of the aims of this paper is to offer different resources to work on English grapheme decoding: to work on the recognition of chunks of sounds and how to pronounce them, instead of relapsing to the L1 pronunciation influence (Metsala and Ehri, 1998).

Phonetic and decoding training in this study will focus on some of the most problematic diphthong sounds that constantly interfere in the comprehension and intelligibility of Catalan students' English production. Cebrian and Carlet (2014) state that “phonetic training involves specialised perceptual or pronunciation training with the objective of directing learners' attention to specific target sounds or sound contrasts that are challenging for them” (p. 475). Therefore, the aim of this study is to improve Catalan students' communication and production of the English language, and at the same time facilitate the grapheme-phoneme relation while reading in English.

Nevertheless, the resources that will be proposed and applied are thought as a complement of the English classes, to train some usual specific issues of Catalan speaking students, but never with the aim of eclipsing other essential aspects of the English language learning that also need attention. As Cebrian and Carlet (2014) defend, “despite the positive effect of training on segmental identification, it is clear that improving the overall perceptual ability and intelligibility in a foreign language involves more than just teaching learners to identify a closed set of sounds” (p. 492). In sum, this

study aims to provide new resources, and supports that give teachers and students the occasion to work explicitly and in a contextualised way the target features of the English language.

2. The context

In the last years, Catalan schools are giving more attention to how English is being taught and learnt in their classrooms. Different methodologies have been introduced, as Content and Language Integrated Learning, working through projects and other programs, which aim at improving students' English learning, as the Departament d'Ensenyament of Catalonia has demonstrated through an improvement in students' English results in the 2016-17 academic year (Departament d'Ensenyament, 2017). Nevertheless, including new programs into English lessons does not always mean that they are propitiously applied. Traditional language learning strategies are still prevailing in many of those schools, in which the grammar is the main axis to learn a foreign language. This fact derives from the reality that teachers are influenced by their own educational experience in the school, and as Davin, Chavoshan and Donato (2018) confirm in their study, this positive or negative experiences will reflect their practice as teachers. Consequently, as most of the teachers that are presently teaching as English teachers received a grammar centred education, it implies a huge challenge to break from those structures (Davin, Chavoshan and Donato, 2018).

The school involved in this study is a traditional-mannered school in what is referred to English lessons, that is to say, the classes are grammar focused in which the teacher follows the English books introducing a grammar aspect and therefore, some activities of the book are proposed, which imply one only correct answer. Those closed and passive activities are not always the indicated ones to adapt to all the students, and it is usual in students not to track their own progress through those activities. The present study focused on giving resources to teach a specific aspect of the English language which either is not implicitly learnt, or teachers have not the time or materials to do it. Adding to teacher interventions' the opportunity to focus on a conflictive aspect of

English language learning, through games and guided activities, is the essential proposal of this study.

The interviewed teachers stated that the English pronunciation learning and teaching was essential for foreign language learning, but they likewise asserted that the books that they used during the English lessons did not include enough resources or options to work on students' pronunciation difficulties, and moreover, as teacher 2 stated: "I think the lessons that are included in the book are just the ones because the publishers know that something about pronunciation must be included, and its there, but I don't think it's any great help to the students really". In conclusion, researchers claim that more explicit work on pronunciation is needed in the lessons (Shah, Othman and Senom, 2017) to improve students' English learning, and this resides in finding ways to implement this learning process in teachers' practise. Hence, as Sørensen and Meyer (2007) argue, games are the option that could help to solve this linguistic negligence.

3. Methodology

3.1. The study

The data collected in this paper aimed at the English phonetic field for foreign language learners. More specifically, the aspects on which this study focused were some of the most problematic English diphthongs for Foreign language learners, either for their different pronunciation or their exceptions: diphthongs /ei/ and /ai/, which include vowels that glide toward the /i/ sound, and /iə/ and /εə/, which are vowels that glide toward schwa. Three groups of children, randomly chosen, were exposed to several sessions focused on target diphthongs, in which they had the chance to play some games with the objective of improving children's awareness and pronunciation of English diphthongs in a self-assured context, as playing games can be. The three groups of children were further divided into smaller group, in order to observe students' process closely during the games.

In order to analyse the influence of the proposed games in children's detection and pronunciation of the target diphthongs of the primary education students participating in this sessions, two research questions guided this study:

1. Are games useful to support English diphthongs' pronunciation and detection?
2. Do games influence positively in the students' learning process?

3.2. Participants and school context

In this study, twenty-five primary education students participated in the sequence of games and the test done before and after them. The students were from three different groups of 6th grade of primary education from a Catalan state-funded private school. The school is situated in a medium-size town in Central Catalonia. The selected participants of this study were mostly Catalan, although two of them were either British or Nigerian. The groups were constituted by fourteen boys and eleven girls, all of them were between eleven and twelve years of age.

The participants of this study were randomly chosen, that is to say, no requisites were used to include students in the groups, as the games aimed at establishing the proposals as a routine where they knew each other and could focus on the games without external interrupting factors. Students' English level was not a selection factor, as although they all were equally exposed to English inside the school, some of them were taking extra scholar English lessons. Their school's EFL lessons were taught by one native English teacher 4 hours per week: three hours of conventional English lessons and one hour of English project. Those conventional lessons were mainly textbook-based and focused on grammar and vocabulary, whereas the English project was mainly students' free work following a specific topic. The current English lessons or the project had no explicit focus on phonetics, or either materials to work it implicitly, as teachers confirmed in their interviews. Students source of English phonetic knowledge was essentially the teachers' input and their oral corrections.

While the sessions were being executed, the small groups were not differentiated by English level, they all were mixed depending on their responsibilities in their main class. That is to say, the games session were done as a complement to students' current English classes, so while students were not required in the class, they were taken to another space to participate in this study. Gaming sessions were performed during three weeks, in which students received at least one session of 15 minutes per game, that is a minimum of 3 sessions and 45 minutes of students' exposure. Altogether, including the pre-test, the gaming sessions and the post-test, the study lasted for 5 sessions in a three week period during the second term of the school year.

3.3. Instruments

Three separate instruments were used to analyse the study results: the pre and post-test, the games intervention between tests and the school's English teachers interviews. The pre-test was carried out before the games intervention, whether the post-test was done after them, and the time between the tests was three weeks. The mentioned instruments were used to guarantee different sources of results, in order to analyse the outcome from three different perspectives.

Concerning to students' diphthong pronunciation and recognition testing, one reading and one "odd one out" task were twice conducted: before (March, 16th 2018) and after (April, 10th 2018) the games sessions (from March 19th to April 9th), as a tangible evidence of their progression. The mentioned reading was extracted from "Really Learn English" short stories, a text peculiarly replete of different types of diphthongs. Both first and second reading tasks were done with the same text and both were recorded with the intention of analysing the contrasts before and after students' participation in the study (see appendix 1). The "odd one out" exercise showed ten sets of words (see appendix 2), every set had one word that did not had the same diphthong as the others, so that differentiated word needed to be excluded, e.g., from the words "excited, lie, say, try, fine", the word "say" would have to be crossed out. The same ten sets were likewise

proposed before and after the games, as an explicit result of the progression of diphthong detection and differentiation.

The games exposed below were created for this study in order to promote a relaxed and amusing context where children, in small groups, could learn while playing with diphthong-centered challenges. The set of games consisted on three different activities in which each one of them had different goals, which will be defined in order of appearance in the sessions.

Game 1: The diphthong board

The first game implemented after doing the reading and “odd one out” test was “the diphthong board”. This game was based on a classic board game, but the squares had four different colours; one colour per diphthong. Every player had a chip. In turns, they had to roll the dice. Depending on the number, they had to move their chip forward to one square or another. When they were on the correspondent square, they had to say two words with the target diphthong and then move forward to the next square with the same colour. Then it was the other player’s turn. That is to say, if one player landed on an orange square, that was the one that corresponded to the /ai/ diphthong, he or she had to say: “from mile to lie” and move his or her chip to the next orange square. To start, they had the classified words according to the diphthong they have (see Table 1). Those words were grouped accordingly with the colour of the board’s squares. Therefore, to start with the game, we had the words with an image or a visual support to help them relate the word with the meaning. We took every word and pronounced them altogether, emphasising the diphthong in it. When the children had practised enough and memorised which diphthongs corresponded to each colour, the visual support that contained the groups of words were removed. In conclusion, the goal of this game was to say correctly the words and to reach the end of the board sooner than the other players.

Table 1. Diphthongs worked with game 1

<i>/ei/</i>	<i>/ai/</i>						<i>/ia/</i>				<i>/ea/</i>					
Race	Tail	Say	Die	Tire	Try	Right	Eye	Hear	Beer	Here	Serious	Weird	Hare	Hair	Swear	There
Face	Fail	May	Lie	Mile	By	Excited		Ear	Deer				Square	Stairs	Wear	
Wave	Wait			Dice		Find		Dear	Volunteer				Share	Air	Bear	
Table	Rain			Nice		Idea		Tear	Cheers				Dare	Chair		
Whale	Mail							Beard					Care			
Plane								Fear								
Late								Year								
Favourite																
Fake																

Game 2: Sounds like sound?

Next in order, the game “Sounds like sound?” was proposed. In this game, every player had a board with tabs in which there were images that represented a word that contains a certain diphthong (see Table 2). The game started with all the tabs opened. Every player had a secret card and the other players had to guess which word it is making questions about the diphthong in it. With the structure: “does it sound like...?” and followed by a word from a group of diphthongs, i.e., “does it sound like bike?”, if the answer was affirmative, the player who asked the question put down the tabs that did not have the /ai/ sound, so they were closer to guess the word. If the answer was negative, the player who asked the question had to put the words with the sound /ai/ down, as that diphthong was not the one in the other player’s secret card. Therefore, the aim of this game was to guess the other player’s secret card while differentiating the different groups of diphthongs.

Table 2. Diphthongs worked with game 2

/eɪ/		/aɪ/				/iə/				/ɛə/				
Race	Tail	Die	Tire	Try	Right	Eye	Hear	Beer	Here	Weird	Hare	Hair	Swear	There
Face	Fail	Lie	Mile		Excited		Ear	Deer			Square	Stairs	Wear	
Wave			Dice		Find		Dear	Volunteer			Share	Air	Bear	
Table			Nice		Idea		Tear				Dare	Chair		
Whale							Beard				Care			
Plane							Fear							
Late														
Favourite														

Game 3: Basket pronunciation game

In this last game, they had different cards that contained images that represented words with diphthongs (see Table 3). There were as many baskets as target diphthongs, that is four baskets. In teams, they had to put the cards on the correspondent basket. To do so, they had to think of a sentence including their word. For instance, if they picked the card with “weird” they had to create a sentence with “weird” before inserting the card in the basket. The ones that finished first had to decide with which diphthong would they create the rhymes, and also chose which diphthong had the other team to work with. Finally, students had to put into the basket their correspondent cards after they created a sentence, and then they had to use the words to create some verses to do a song or rap. Thus, the aim of the game was to create sentences with the words that had diphthongs after they had been able to put them into the basket.

Table 3. Diphthongs worked with game 3

/eɪ/		/aɪ/				/iə/				/ɛə/				
Race	Tail	Die	Tire	Try	Right	Eye	Hear	Beer	Here	Weird	Hare	Hair	Swear	There
Face	Fail	Lie	Mile		Excited		Ear	Deer			Square	Stairs	Wear	
Wave			Dice		Find		Dear	Volunteer			Share	Air	Bear	
Table			Nice		Idea		Tear				Dare	Chair		
Whale							Beard				Care			
Plane							Fear							
Late														
Favourite														

In order to be aware of teachers' opinion and perspectives, three teachers were interviewed. The teachers taught in different courses in the same school where the study was carried out. One of the interviewed teachers had been teaching English in this school for fifteen years, and the two other had been teaching English for seven and eight years in the same school. Both had also been working in private academies before starting teaching in the school. The above-mentioned interviews had three different sections: teacher's experience with teaching pronunciation to students and their perception of this topic, teacher's own methodology to teach pronunciation during his or her lessons, and usefulness of games in this field. The objective of interviewing English teachers who teach in Catalonia was to confirm what has been exposed during this study: the need of explicit resources to work English pronunciation, also in a Catalan context.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

In order to analyse the students' progression through the target games, two data collection times were organised during one month: from March 2018 to April 2018. One data collection was towards the end of the second trimester of the school year, in which students ability to read a complex and full of diphthongs text was recorded and analysed (see appendix 1). Ten sets of 'odd one out' were also proposed to children during the first data collection (see appendix 2), in which they could find ten different groups of words. The groups of words had a target diphthong, that is to say, the first group of words shared the /ai/ diphthong although the words had different transcriptions of this sound, the second group shared the /ei/ diphthong, along with the others (see appendix 2). Both the text and the 'odd one out' were carried out in order to consider which diphthong sounds were more challenging to pronounce and identify for Catalan students.

The second data collection was carried out towards the beginning of the third trimester of the school year, twenty-seven days after the first one. This time, the tasks had the

same items as the first, but it was implemented after the sessions where students could play and learn diphthongs' pronunciation explicitly. Both data collections were recorded through audios, to analyse their readings, and through the 'odd one out' sets, to calculate the percentage of correct answers before and after the pronunciation games.

The progression during the game sessions was also recorded through photographs and observation to document the improvement and acquisition of diphthongs pronunciation learning.

4. Results

This section consists of two different types of evidence. The first one comes through the analysis of the participants' audios reading the above mentioned text, comparing the one recorded before the games and the one recorded after the games. The second one is provided by the "odd one out" exercise, carried out through the same dynamics as the readings.

Focusing on the audios' comparison, the improvements in teaching of the text were not very remarkable, although a slight improvement in the final test is visible (Fig. 1). The analysis of both initial and final tests were carried out by selecting the words that had the four diphthongs that have been mentioned through the study, and counting how many of those words were well pronounced. The words that the participants pronounced correctly at the beginning were still well pronounced after the games (see appendix 3 to see students' specific results), but the number of corrected pronunciations, that is to say, the target diphthong words that were corrected was not very large. Figure 1 shows that all the groups in general pronounced correctly more than 60% of the words, and a small progress is reflected in the final test.

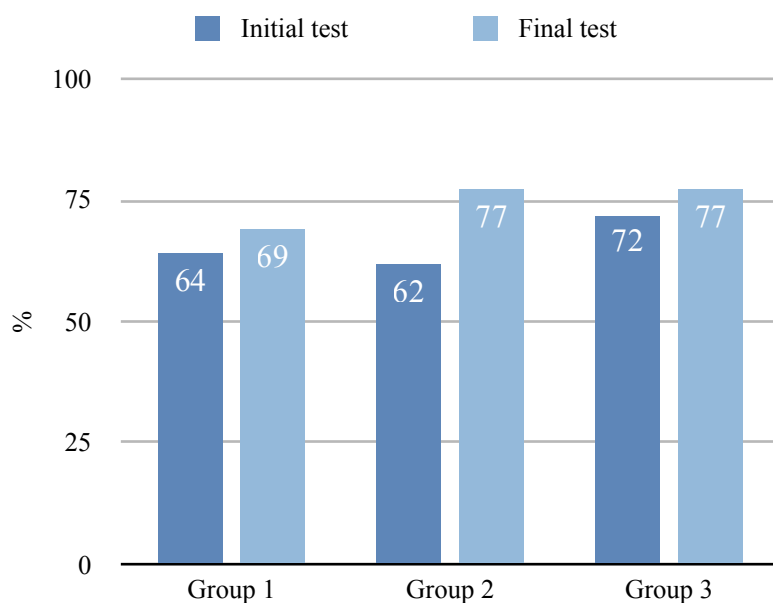


Fig 1. Percentage of well pronounced words in the initial and final reading tests

Regarding the initial testing through the “odd one out”, table 4 indicates the achievement of every group of students. Every line represents the number of correct answers of every set of the “odd one out”. The results are separated according to the sets, as every group of words showed different transcriptions of the diphthongs (see tables 1, 2 and 3). Therefore, table 4 presents a general view of diphthong recognition by the study participants before being introduced to the games. In general, the results are quite positive, although some of the sets were not achieved by more than a 60% of the participants. For instance, table 4 shows an extremely low result in the third /ei/ diphthong set, a fact that could mean that the word “weird” clearly confused the participants. In the table, it can be seen that the /ai/ diphthong in its different pronunciations is the most easily recognised, although it is not as clear with the other sets. Another characteristic of the results is the evidence from the first /iə/ diphthong set, in which all the words had the same diphthong sounds, but one of them does not sound the same as the others, and few students were aware of this (to see every student’s specific results, see appendix 4).

Table 4. Number of correct answers in the initial test

Diphthongs	Group 1 (n=7)	Group 2 (n=8)	Group 3 (n=10)	Total (N=25)	%
/ai/ 1	5	6	8	19	76
/ai/ 2	2	6	7	15	60
/ai/ 3	6	5	8	19	76
/ei/ 1	4	7	7	18	72
/ei/ 2	1	3	4	8	32
/ei/ 3	4	5	6	15	60
/iə/ 1	2	2	4	8	32
/iə/ 2	2	7	6	15	60
/ɛə/ 1	4	6	5	15	60
/ɛə/ 2	5	3	7	15	60

After the first test was implemented, the game sessions started with the explained order: the diphthong board, “sounds like sound?”, and the diphthong basket. The sessions were enjoyable for the participants, and they accepted the proposals with enthusiasm. Every game started with a short explanation or remembering about diphthongs, and the instructions to play the correspondent game. Afterwards, the final test was carried out, putting into practice the experience and knowledge acquired through the games. Table 5 indicates the groups of participants’ improvement to recognise and differentiate the worked diphthongs after the game sessions. The results are positive, as every set of the “odd one out” increased in the number of correct answers. As in table 5, the /ai/ diphthong still had more correct answers over the others, although the results of the other sets were not as distant as in the initial test. For instance, the second /ei/ set in which appeared the word “weird” were achieved by more of the 50% of the students, although it was still the lowest. The other extreme example that was confusing for the students (the first /iə/ set), also increased in its number of correct answers, fact that could mean that students do not rely only on the written transcription of the diphthongs but that they had created a relation between the different pronunciations of a same transcription, that is to say, although the word “here” and “there” had the same vowels, the “e” pronunciation of both are different, as “here” has the diphthong /iə/ and “there”

has the diphthong /εə/. (To see every student’s specific results in the final test, see appendix 4).

Table 5. Number of correct answers in the final test

Diphthongs	Group 1 (n=7)	Group 2 (n=8)	Group 3 (n=10)	Total (N=25)	%
/ai/ 1	6	8	10	24	96
/ai/ 2	3	7	8	18	72
/ai/ 3	6	6	10	22	88
/ei/ 1	6	8	9	23	92
/ei/ 2	3	4	6	13	52
/ei/ 3	5	8	8	21	84
/iə/ 1	2	5	10	17	68
/iə/ 2	5	8	7	20	80
/εə/ 1	6	8	9	23	92
/εə/ 2	6	8	9	23	92

To sum up, Figure 2 illustrates the whole group final results’ difference from the initial to the final test for every set of diphthongs in the “odd one out”. As Figure 2 shows, the /iə/ and /εə/ diphthongs; that is to say, the ones that glide towards schwa are the ones in which the participants had improved the most.

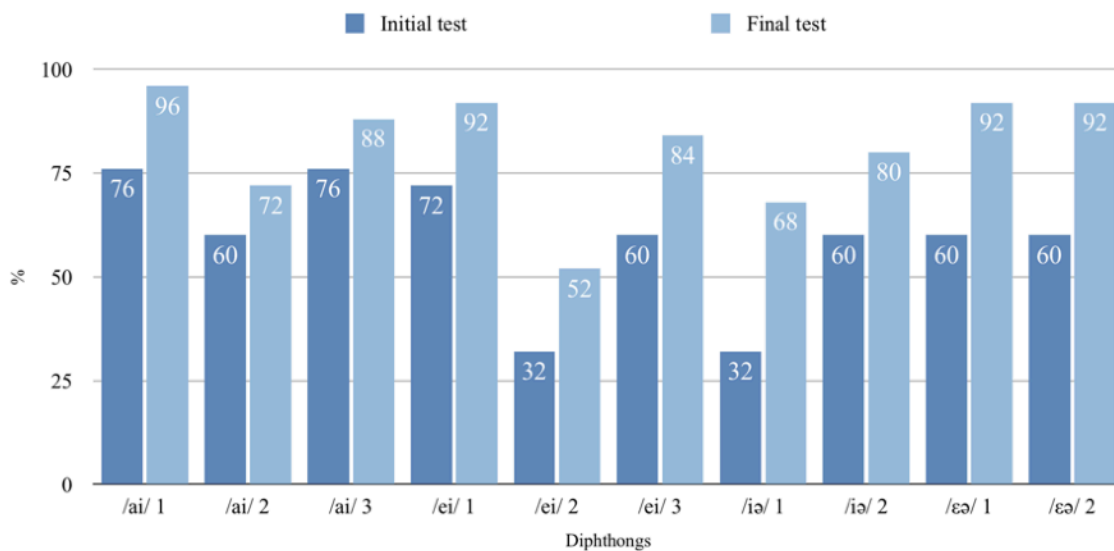


Fig. 2. Percentage of achievement in the initial and final test

5. Discussion

In relation to the first research question, the differences between the initial and final evidences are considerable: the three groups of participants improved to a large extent after the game sessions, as shown in the results section. The most relevant enhancement is related to the two types of diphthongs that glide towards schwa, which could mean that these diphthongs are the least emphasised during the English lessons, that is to say, they are diphthongs which are not easy to detect for Catalan speakers, and having a resource to hear and pronounce them explicitly, as games, has promoted the acquisition by the participants of this study. This result reiterates what Sadat-Tehrani's (2017) study stated: the need of explicit pronunciation teaching for students to improve in their awareness of the language and its use. This result is also related to what the English teachers of the school mentioned during the interviews: "I think it's so important, because it is important to help them to pronounce well, because if they learn a word in a not correct way, they will always mispronounce this word, and then it's very difficult to correct it" (teacher 1). Neither the English teachers nor the books that they use during their lessons have enough options or resources to work on English pronunciation beyond their own oral productions, confirming what Breikreutz and Derwing (2001) stated in their article, and what also is confirmed in this study's interviews: "maybe we don't have time, or maybe we don't know the way to do it that could really help" (teacher 3). English teachers in this Catalan school defended that pronunciation needs to be more emphasised during the lessons, but none of them had any resource or knew about any support to go further into this topic.

The results obtained from the "odd one out" can also be used to answer the study's second question. Having games as a source for learning has demonstrated that complicated language aspects such as English diphthongs can be acquired, or at least, students can be more aware of the different transcriptions that can have one same diphthong sound, e.g. "weird" and "here" share the same diphthong sounds, but their transcription is different. Pronunciation games are a resource that can be naturally introduced in the English sessions to learn those aspects that most of the English books

do not offer. Moreover, the proposed games have not only been useful to learn, and in the same way, Johnson et al. (2005) affirmed that games are the way to let students be motivated while being exposed to what the teachers want them to learn. The games made children get involved in a context with English exposure, following instructions to acquire the objective but, at the same time, having the feeling of freedom that is always implicit in games. Therefore, free and guided activities had a positive effect on students' learning (Yunus et al., 2016, Saito and Lyster, 2011), as games had contributed to students' disposition to participate actively in the games, and simultaneously, in their own process of learning. Playing with words that students already knew and some that were new for them, but focusing on them from a different point of view, is what made this study worth it, and what makes the usefulness of this enjoyable and explicit resource evident.

Nevertheless, the reading results, did not show relevant changes before and after the games. Reading the text with most of the words that were present during the games was not the most adequate instrument to prove students' progress, as the time of intervention may not have been enough to improve through the challenging process of English reading for foreign language learners. Moreover, the reading process of such an intricate text did not bring the opportunity for children to demonstrate their knowledge and, at the same time decode the wording; hence the comparison from the tests after less than two hours exposure was not as positive as the "odd one out" testing. However, as results have shown, there was a small improvement in most of the students when pronouncing some of the target diphthongs in such a short time of exposure, which can anticipate really good results in a longer exposure period.

The third source of data analysis, the interviews, demonstrated what was brought up for discussion while the games were planned. The English teachers of the Catalan context, in general, do not have the resources to work on English pronunciation explicitly. The interviews do not only show teacher's thoughts of teaching pronunciation, but it shows the teachers' reliance on English books, which makes even more difficult to break the

chain: teachers do not teach pronunciation explicitly because the book does not give the chance to do it and instead of putting the books aside, the tendency is to neglect this learning field.

Therefore, results of this study have reaffirmed the authors' ideas and statements, which can be synthesised in two points. Working explicitly in English pronunciation, diphthongs in particular for this study, has helped students' awareness in their detection and pronunciation. Games have been an excellent format to introduce students to this English language area. In sum, the results have demonstrated that before the games, diphthong detection by the students was vague, but increased after them, showing that it is possible to introduce this type of resources in the class and taking advantage of their demonstrated benefits.

6. Conclusions

The school in which this results were obtained is one example of the general situation of English teaching and learning. That is to say, in most of Catalan schools English is taught for between three and four hours per week, but no fraction of those hours is used to teach English pronunciation explicitly. However, the present study, exposing three different groups of 6th grade of primary education to distinct games in which the focus were the diphthongs, has shown improvement in diphthong detection and pronunciation in a short period of time.

The results obtained through this study made evident the fact that games and pronunciation teaching can work inside the EFL classrooms and work as a resource to resort to in different occasions in which explicit exposure to pronunciation features is needed. The games implemented did not demonstrate positive differences through the reading ability of students as the "odd one out" did, but it would be a suggestion for further research to analyse the results in a longer term exposure to the games and explicit diphthong teaching. Nevertheless, the results obtained through the "odd one

out” showed a relevant improvement in participants’ diphthong detection and recognition in the short period of exposure that has been this study.

Regarding the limitations of this study, some elements need to be mentioned. The time of exposure to the games and its outcomes was shorter than what would have been ideal. Consequently, the reading used to analyse the results together with the “odd one out” needed more time of engagement to provides positive results, thus another instrument would be more useful to examine the improvements in a short term exposure.

In sum, this study is an attempt to engage the English teaching community to consider the need for explicit pronunciation teaching to primary education students. The games created specifically for this study have demonstrated not only good results after their implementation, but a meaningful engagement by the participants, guaranteeing advantageous effects in a longer term exposure.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Reading text

Eve is excited to go to her first Dylan Wyman concert in New York. Dylan Wyman is Eve's favorite singer. In fact, Eve tells her mother Jeannine, Dylan Wyman is her favorite *person*!

When they are about halfway to New York, Jeannine hears a weird noise. "Oh no," she says, realizing that they have a flat tire.

There isn't much room on the side of the road, but Jeannine pulls the car over and climbs out. Sure enough, their right rear tire is completely flat.

Jeannine opens the trunk to get the jack and the spare tire. Traffic continues to whiz by at seventy miles per hour.

"Mom, are we going to die?" Eve asks. She is really scared.

"Don't worry honey, I'll be quick," Jeannine says as she starts to jack up the car.

"Wow Mom, how do you know how to do this?" Eve is shocked at her mother's secret talent.

Then Jeannine takes off the flat tire.

"Wow Mom, how do you know how to do *that*?" Eve asks in wonder.

Jeannine just laughs. Then she puts the spare tire on. Eve says, "Mom, who *are* you?"

The entire tire change takes only 10 minutes. They both climb back into the car and Jeannine says, "I'm so sorry honey, but we can't drive all the way to Albany on this spare tire. We're going to have to stop and buy a new tire. We might be late for your concert."

"That's okay, Mom," Eve says, "You're my favorite person now!"

Text from: <http://www.really-learn-english.com/english-short-stories-level-05-story-04.html>

Appendix 2: Odd one out

1. Honey, tire, die, by, right
2. Excited, lie, say, try, fine
3. Find, nice, idea, lip, eye
4. Plane, plain, fake, take, guy
5. Favourite, weird, late, say, rain
6. May, wait, male, ray, lie
7. Hear, weird, beer, here, there
8. Mean, hear, year, dear, tear
9. Swear, wear, where, wheel, there
10. Air, bear, life, chair, care

Appendix 3: Students' specific results (reading)

Initial test:

Group 1	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 1	12
Student 2	29
Student 3	38
Student 4	23
Student 5	27
Student 6	24
Student 7	19

Group 2	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 8	18
Student 9	17
Student 10	29
Student 11	23
Student 12	29
Student 13	26
Student 14	28
Student 15	20

Group 3	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 16	29
Student 17	34
Student 18	29
Student 19	27
Student 20	25
Student 21	30
Student 22	25
Student 23	15
Student 24	31
Student 25	31

Final test:

Group 1	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 1	10
Student 2	29
Student 3	38
Student 4	27
Student 5	29
Student 6	30
Student 7	22

Group 2	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 8	23
Student 9	25
Student 10	33
Student 11	32
Student 12	31
Student 13	32
Student 14	35
Student 15	24

Group 3	n° of well pronounced words (N=38)
Student 16	36
Student 17	34
Student 18	27
Student 19	30
Student 20	23
Student 21	31
Student 22	30
Student 23	21
Student 24	31
Student 25	33

Appendix 4: Students' specific results (odd one out)

✓: correct answer

x: wrong answer

Initial test:

Group 1	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/εə/ 1	/εə/ 2
Student 1	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
Student 3	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Student 4	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 5	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Student 6	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓
Student 7	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x

Group 2	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/ 3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/εə/ 1	/εə/ 2
Student 8	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x
Student 10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x
Student 11	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
Student 12	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Student 13	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 14	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	x
Student 15	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x

Group 3	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/ 3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/ɛə/ 1	/ɛə/ 2
Student 16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Student 17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 18	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 20	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student 21	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 22	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓
Student 23	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 24	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x
Student 25	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	✓

Final test:

Group 1	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/ 3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/εə/ 1	/εə/ 2
Student 1	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x
Student 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Student 4	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 5	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 6	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 7	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓

Group 2	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/ 3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/εə/ 1	/εə/ 2
Student 8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 10	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 12	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 13	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Student 14	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 15	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓

Group 3	/ai/ 1	/ai/ 2	/ai/ 3	/ei/ 1	/ei/ 2	/ei/ 3	/iə/ 1	/iə/ 2	/ɛə/ 1	/ɛə/ 2
Student 16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Student 17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 18	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Student 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 20	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Student 21	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 23	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 24	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student 25	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓