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## Strategies to improve English pronunciation in Czech future teachers of English

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## Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, pouze s použitím primárních a sekundárních zdrojů uvedených v seznamu literatury.

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# Abstract

The bachelor thesis explores the approaches and attitudes towards pronunciation of Czech future teachers of English. The aim of this thesis is to gain insights into strategies to improve pronunciation in Czech future teachers of English. A questionnaire was created for the purposes of this project. The analysis of the questionnaire survey showed that several strategies are being employed in order to improve English pronunciation. The majority of respondents highlighted imitating native speakers as the most effective strategy to improve pronunciation.

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# Introduction

The importance of a good level of pronunciation skills in teachers of English has been speculated many times. Generally, people, and students especially, have different opinions and ideas. However, this variety of ideas may be ultimately beneficial.

Being a Czech future teacher of English means a lot of hard work because teachers must have certain proficiency. Yet, there are some cases when the teacher, for different reasons, does not possess the demanded skills and knowledge. Most of the time, pronunciation appears to be a stumbling block when learning or teaching pronunciation, especially for non-native speakers.

Formerly, when teaching the English language, teachers tend to focus chiefly on grammar, rather than on speaking. But is that the right path to fully acquiring a foreign language? Should not future teachers of English work on their pronunciation as well as they work on morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics? After all, each of the mentioned aspects including phonetics and phonology is a major level of linguistic structure. Because of this fact, future teachers often search for ways to improve their pronunciation as they aim to be adequately competent.

This thesis aims to gain insights into different kinds of strategies that improve pronunciation used by Czech future teachers of English. The whole project is organized into two parts, the theoretical and the empirical part.

In the theoretical part, the thesis will explore pronunciation in general, pronunciation in the education sphere, inevitable difficulties, and specific strategies that are being suggested and used by many linguists and Czech future teachers of English.

What approaches towards the importance of pronunciation do Czech future teachers of English have, what influential factors they have come across, how do they practise pronunciation, and what strategy is the most effective? This will be examined and explored mainly in the empirical part with the help of a questionnaire survey. The data collected from the questionnaire will provide specific information about Czech future teachers of English and their self-assessment, whether they actively work on their own pronunciation, how content are they in the terms of pronouncing skills and last, but not least, what strategies to

improve English pronunciation these future teachers find the most effective. Additionally, respondents will be asked about their own ideas about English pronunciation. That and more will help the thesis to investigate different opinions and experiences of Czech future teachers of English.

# Theoretical part

## 1. Pronunciation in the educational process

Pronunciation in English as a second language learning and teaching has its special place. Because of the enormous spread of English around the world a long time ago, English as a subject has been added to compulsory parts of the Czech school curriculum. English teachers are needed in the Czech Republic, as well as in many other countries. The first chapter of this thesis deals with the place of pronunciation in the educational process including its models.

English has become a lingua franca, a language that is adopted as a “*common or commercial tongue among people of diverse speech*” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2022), and that is why speaking English is important nowadays.

The main purpose when learning a foreign language is not to sound like a native speaker, but to be able to communicate in a global context. According to Walker (2010, p. 15), “*intelligibility is paramount to English as a Lingua Franca communication.*”

Czech teachers of English main goal then should be to teach their learners effective communication with other people from all around the world. Therefore, teachers’ pronunciation must be superior for students to pick up the best version of spoken English.

However, despite the pronunciation importance “*increased interest in pronunciation only started in the last decades of the 20th century, especially as far as intelligibility is concerned*” (Pennington & Richards, 1986; Pennington, 1998). This “*increased interest has continued ever since*” (Munro & Derwing, 2011). Unfortunately, as Piccardo (2016) claims, *this increase “have not had yet a serious impact at the level of teacher education, material development and language policy documents”*. However, since these mentioned studies, the interest in pronunciation increased again, along with teachers’ awareness of pronunciation importance, which will be discussed in the empirical part of this thesis.

According to Berry (2021) “*pronunciation is a critical component of oral communication*”. Therefore, pronunciation needs to be taught.

## 1.2 Models in pronunciation teaching

As with any other rich language, English can be spoken in many varieties. However, this chapter explores the most used model in pronunciation teaching is explored.

Even though “*it is best to allow your learners to choose the variety they prefer*” (Laroy, 1995, p.11), young learners have always been exposed to British English mainly. English textbooks for Czech learners are designed in British English, simply because of the fact, it is considered Standard English.

Standard English is “*well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated and is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood*” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2022). In a simple way, it avoids non-standard grammatical constructions and accents varying from the usual.

According to Jonnie Robinson’s (2007) article, “*received pronunciation, or RP for short, is the instantly recognisable accent often described as ‘typically British’*”. Notice RP is presented as an accent and not a dialect. People who speak RP are at the same time speakers of Standard English.

Phonemic transcriptions in dictionaries are based on this accent, RP is what most people from foreign countries are taught when studying English (Robinson, 2007). Roach (2009) adds RP is also most familiar as the accent used on serious national and international BBC broadcasting channels.

In Czech schools, it is not any different, the general RP forms are the most used by Czech teachers of English. Throughout the journey of studying the English language, Czech learners are taught the language in the RP model, they learn the language using Standard English.

This Received Pronunciation is greatly prestigious and appears to be ideal for non-native students, however, as Gimson (1967) noted, RP is considered the standard practically only in England, as other English-speaking countries have their own forms they view as standard. General American English (GA) is widely used as well, these two accents may seem

to compete together. Walker (2010, p.5) describes RP and GA as “*the two dominant models*”.

Practically, it is up to a teacher what model he/she chooses. However, a combination of more accents could lead to confusion. It is important to adhere to one model only.

Only later, when English learners have reached a higher level of the language and are able to communicate fluently, may they show interest in exploring and trying out other models of English pronunciation. Other models are e.g., Australian English, Scottish English, or International English. Teachers of English can then present different accents and dialects too, to enrich their lessons for their students.

All in all, as mentioned below, among Czech and other non-native speakers of English, the RP model wins. However, non-native speakers hardly become British or American, and some differences in their speech will occur. The biggest model learners are exposed to is their teacher. According to Hancock (2020), teachers will mostly teach in the normal accent they have, and Hancock thinks “*we should accept and embrace that reality because if a teacher is competent and intelligible, it doesn’t matter what their accent is.*” Again, intelligibility and the teacher’s competence are desired. One may speak in a non-standard or non-native accent and still be understood by others.

## 1.3 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Making language teaching and testing easier, the Council of Europe established a document providing the organisation of language proficiency levels. This subchapter investigates this document in the terms of pronunciation teaching.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard for describing language ability (Council of Europe, 2022). It describes language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. Following educational standards and requirements in the Czech curriculum, the level of an EFL teacher needs to reach the C1 level.

In an interview with experts from Cambridge English (Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2022), Dr Nick Saville explains this framework “*does not provide you with all the answers, it provides a way of coming up with the answers. It is a way of addressing what needs to be done*”. CEFR presents a useful tool. With its help, anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners can determine the level of different qualifications. However, it is not a fixed framework which means it still needs to be individualized. Yet, CEFR focuses on what needs to be learned to make a progress.

As the Council of Europe (2001) presents phonological competence involves the knowledge and production of:

- the sound-units (phonemes) of the language and their realisation in particular contexts (allophones),
- the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes (distinctive features, e.g. voicing, rounding, nasality, plosion),
- the phonetic composition of words (syllable structure, the sequence of phonemes, word stress, word tones),
- sentence phonetics (prosody): sentence stress and rhythm, intonation,
- phonetic reduction: vowel reduction, strong and weak forms, assimilation, elision.

To speak the targeted language, learners must be able to “*articulate the utterance (phonetic skills)*” (Council of Europe, 2001) and to listen, they must be able to “*perceive the utterance (auditory phonetic skills)*” (Council of Europe, 2001), both of which involves phonological processes.

In the case of pronunciation, the Council of Europe (2022) also mentions that “*At the level of availability of specific tools for assessing phonological competence, beyond the CEFR phonology scale, the result of the documentary research showed that pronunciation is rarely explicitly included among the features to be assessed, being generally subsumed under ‘speaking’ or ‘fluency’.*”

An example of CEFR descriptors focusing specifically on pronunciation features is:

“*C2 – Can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely*” (Council of Europe, 2022).

Finally, the importance of CEFR is certainly acknowledged. It is used by books and institutions because it provides the measurement of learners' progress and level. It can help teachers avoid inconsistencies during evaluation.

However, some researchers claim, “*unlike vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation features cannot be grouped by CEFR level*” (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The truth is, even the more challenging sounds occur in the lowest A1 level. For instance, spelling “th” generally produces two sounds in English pronunciation /θ/ and /ð/, sounds that are frequent in many words learned by beginners.

Hence, it would be appropriate to rather prioritize pronunciation instruction based on the differences between the target language pronunciation and phonology of the learner's native language, than on the learner's general level of English proficiency (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Nevertheless, English teacher awareness of CEFR is necessary.

## 1.4 Pronunciation of Czech teachers of English

Scrivener (2011) argues that the most important pedagogical activities of an English teacher are teaching the language and teaching-learning at the same time.

Hanušová (2005) offers a classification of the competencies of English teachers, and divides the subject matter competencies of English language teachers into the following sub-competences:

- communicative competence,
- linguistic competence,
- sociocultural and intercultural competence,
- literary-scientific competence,
- linguodidactic competence (Hanušová 2005: 27).

What primarily distinguishes a teacher of English from a teacher of other subjects is his or her linguistic competence.

Kenworthy's (1987) suggestion for teachers is to help students distinguish between

more or less important features of their pronunciation since they are not usually able to do so by themselves. Czech future teachers of English should be competent enough to do so.

Teachers need to pay careful attention to pronunciation when teaching English as a foreign language. The communication between the teacher and the student lies mainly on the oral level. Moreover, teachers play a significant role in the learning process, and as models, they must set the best possible example for the learners. Primarily, the teacher's practice is the key to success. Among other things, the empirical part of this thesis will later focus on Czech future teachers of English pronunciation practice.

If students learn how to say the words and phrases, with correct intonation and rhythm, then at the same time they can understand and communicate with others (Shtern, 2017). Poor pronunciation leads to problems in comprehension which is not one of the teacher's goals.

## 1.5 Importance of pronunciation in teaching

Teaching pronunciation is a fundamental element for teachers (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2016; Bodorík, 2017), which may be challenging for multiple reasons. Challenges impact teachers' attitudes toward teaching pronunciation. Often, they lack self-confidence, knowledge, and skills, hence many teachers do not practice pronunciation teaching (Macdonald, 2002). The importance of pronunciation should not be questioned, yet there will always be different opinions.

Aside from the grammar, teachers talk to their students and teach them how to say different words from the start. Learners must hear the language, carefully listen to the sound of it, and finally, they must concentrate on the way the words are pronounced, so they catch it and repeat it, and then they can compare their performances (J.D. O'Connor, BEP, 1970). Pronunciation needs to be drilled to achieve at least basic communication skills.

Since there is a low possibility of the complete disappearance of the learner's accent, the main purpose of pronunciation training is to increase the level of speech understanding (Shtern, 2017). Teaching pronunciation appears to be necessary since verbal communication is the most common type of communication.

Uchida and Sugimoto's (2016) studies describe two types of teachers, those who are confident in pronunciation teaching and those that are not. The level of confidence seems to play a key role in attitudes towards teaching pronunciation. Teachers with low confidence in pronunciation skills neglect the importance of pronunciation in their lessons. Not only Scrivener realised that *"teachers often shy away from pronunciation work, yet it is key for students"* (Scrivener, 2011).

To master any foreign language, including English, man needs training. Linguistic disciplines such as phonetics and phonology would not be in English textbooks if these areas were considered pointless.

To conclude the first chapter, there are many suggestions and methods on how to manage pronunciation at schools. Nonetheless, it is important to stick to the main aim of the learning process, which is reaching intelligibility. *"The more words a listener is able to identify accurately when said by a particular speaker, the more intelligible that speaker is"* (Kenworthy, 1987).

## 2 Pronunciation features

One of the necessities before inserting teaching pronunciation in a classroom is to set out its aspects. English pronunciation comes with distinctive features future teachers of English should be aware of. This chapter will focus on pronunciation as a linguistic discipline. It will present a description of pronunciation features together with a brief comparison to the Czech language.

Most of the time, as students, Czech future teachers of English take phonetics classes, where they study the production and perception of speech sounds, and phonology classes which concern the study of more complex and abstract sound patterns and structures. Phonetics and phonology present all the necessary knowledge one needs to pronounce correctly, they “*provide systematic and well-founded understandings of the sound patterns of English*” (Delahunty, Garvey, 2004).

### 2.1 Definition of pronunciation

Dictionaries define pronunciation as “*the way in which a word or letter is said, or said correctly, or the way in which a language is spoken*” (Cambridge University Press, 2022), or more precisely “*the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability*” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2022).

### 2.2 International Phonetic Alphabet

English words are made up of only 44 to 48 individual sounds called phonemes. According to Britannica’s (2022) definition, phonemes are “*the smallest units of speech distinguishing one word (or word element) from another*”.

Many of the speech units are pronounced differently or alternatively, some English sounds do not even exist in the Czech language. For identification and correct enunciation

of the individual sounds, a phonemic chart is used. Specifically, the International Phonetic Alphabet, IPA for short, is an alphabet developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for an accurate representation of the pronunciation of languages, providing a unique symbol for every phoneme (Britannica, 2022).

IPA, as “*a system where each symbol is associated with a particular English sound*” (The London School of English, 2017), helps to learn the exact pronunciation of English words. As Gut (2009) claims in her book, “*for anyone concerned with the structure and realization of sounds, be it linguists, language teachers, speech therapists or people working in speech technology, transcription is an essential tool*”.

The complete IPA chart is available on the website of the International Phonetic Association (2020).

## 2.3 Segmental features

The segmental pronunciation system of a language refers to phonemes as distinctive segmental entities. These already introduced smallest units of speech that make one word different from another are distinguished by their certain quality.

Factually, there are two types of phonemes: consonants and vowels. The following subchapter will provide a description of their characteristics which is of great importance when acquiring a language’s pronunciation.

### 2.3.1 Consonants

English consonants are included in segmental phonology. Fromkin et al. (2011) defined consonant as “*speech sound produced with some constriction of the air stream*”. Pennington (1996) simplified the definition and stated: “*consonants are sounds made with closed or nearly closed articulations*”.

Consonants can be classified according to the following characteristics:

- the place of articulation,
- the manner of articulation,
- and voicing.

Firstly, the place of articulation *“is defined by the location of an active articulator functioning alone or in concert with another articulator”* (Pennington, 1996). It can be said Czech and English share these characteristics.

Sounds /p/, /b/ and /m/ are bilabial consonants, which means their primary articulators are the lips. Sounds /f/ and /v/ are called labiodental, as they are articulated by the lower lip and upper teeth. For non-native speakers, dental consonants /θ/ and /ð/ are one of the first problems as they only exist in English (Czech has none). When English teachers pronounce dental consonants, *“the tongue tip and rims articulate with the upper teeth”* (Cruttenden, 2008, p.27). However, for Czech learners, /θ/ and /ð/ present new challenging sounds. Therefore, non-native learners may need to spend some time training these consonants, especially to avoid a very common substitution for more familiar sounds such as /t/ and /d/.

As Derwing and Munro (2005) indicated, many pronunciation struggles can be rooted in perception issues.

Next, there are alveolar consonants /t/, /d/, /l/, /n/, /s/, and /z/ that appear in English as well as in Czech. However, the difference is Czech came up with 3 special alveolar consonants: \ʎ, \ř and \ʀ, which significantly differs from the post-alveolar English /r/. The /r/ of the RP is pronounced by the tip of the tongue articulating with the rear part of the alveolar ridge. Nevertheless, studies showed *“many Czech learners learn the correct pronunciation of the /r/ rather quickly, although they are often not consistent in its usage”* (Zemková, 2018). Moreover, the /r/ pronunciation among native speakers of English differs due to several dialects, thus, incorrect pronunciation of the /r/ is not likely to cause major obstacles in intelligibility (Zemková, 2018). In the case of palato-alveolar consonants /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, these exist both in English and Czech, so it can be presumed they are easy to pronounce.

Both Czech and English produce a consonant, where the front of the tongue articulates with the hard palate, and it is the sound /j/ classified as a palatal consonant. However, Czech has more palatal consonants as it adds \t\ \d\ and \ň\.

In the case of velar consonants are articulated by the back of the tongue and the soft palate. /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/ are shared in both languages, on the other hand, Czech also has /x/ (manifested by “ch”).

Finally, the remaining consonant /h/ is called glottal. /h/ is pronounced by means of an obstruction or a narrowing that causes friction but not vibration between the vocal folds (Cruttenden, 2008).

To summarise provided description, in the terms of the place of the articulation, when using velar sounds, “*the back of the tongue articulates with the soft palate*”, palatal “*the front of the tongue articulates with the hard palate*”, palato-alveolar “*either the blade, or the tip and blade, of the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge and there is at the same time a raising of the front of the tongue towards the hard palate*” and alveolar “*either the blade or tip and blade, of the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge*” (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 29).

The consonants shared by Czech and English usually share the manner of articulation, which determines how much obstruction there is between the articulators, ranging from a total obstruction to friction only. Knight (2012) listed five manners of articulation: plosives, fricatives, approximants, affricates, and nasals.

Stop consonants called plosives are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/ are produced by a complete closure in the vocal tract, followed by a sudden release of the air pressure (Pennington, 1996). In their comparison between Czech and English, English plosives can be aspirated, which is not available in Czech phonology. According to Roach (1983), aspiration means “*a period during which air escapes through the vocal cords, making a sound like /h/*”. English plosives can appear at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word (Roach, 2009, p. 26), and the aspiration depends on the position of the vowel in a word (it occurs at the beginning of a word or at the beginning of a stressed syllable). Exceptionally, if plosives stand behind the phoneme /s/, they cannot be aspirated.

Correct use of aspiration affects comprehension, as Roach (1983) explains, if a native speaker hears a word with unaspirated /p/, /t/ or /k/ in a place where it should be aspirated, they will mistake it for /b/, /d/ or /g/.

Moving on, consonants /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /θ/, /ð/ are all fricatives. They are produced by air escaping through a small passage creating a hissing sound (Roach, 1983).

Affricates are a combination of plosives and fricatives - they begin as plosives with yet end as fricatives. The affricates shared by Czech and English are /tʃ/ and /dʒ/.

Nasal consonants can be generally defined as consonants, where the air escapes through the nose and not through the mouth; altogether there are three nasal consonants - m, n, ŋ (Roach, 2009, p. 46).

Lastly, approximants are characterised by a narrowing in the mouth but not enough to cause friction. Being continuant – *“sounded with the vocal tract only partly closed, allowing the breath to pass through and the sound to be prolonged”* (Oxford University Press, 2022) and frictionless, approximants share characteristics with vowels, which will be discussed later in this thesis. An approximant shared by English and Czech is /j/. English has /w/ and English /r/ as well, however, the Czech /r/ is trilled and vibrates. The last approximant is /l/, and it is known as a lateral approximant, which is *“made by releasing air past the sides of the tongue whilst making a block in the middle”* (The Mimic Method, 2019).

The last classification is based on whether consonants are voiced or unvoiced (voiceless). According to Knight (2012, p.18), consonants can be either voiced or voiceless depending on whether the vocal cords are vibrating or not. More specifically, the recognition of voiced or voiceless consonants is based on vibrations when touching the larynx with fingers (Knight, 2012, p. 18). Voiced consonants are /b/, /v/, /d/, /m/, /n/, /r/ and voiceless /p/, /f/, /s/, /t/, /k/, /h/.

In the Czech versus English case, the usage of voiced and voiceless quality differs, which again can cause problems in intelligibility. English does not employ final consonant devoicing but Czech does, therefore Czech learners often mistakenly devoice final consonants in words like pig, where [pɪg] becomes [pɪk] (Zemková, 2018).

## 2.3.2 Vowels

As Delahunty and Garvey (2010, p.98) noted, “*vowels include the sounds we ordinarily represent as the letters <a, e, i, o, u>, as well as a number of other sounds for which the ordinary alphabet has no unique symbols.*” They can be distinguished from consonants in several ways.

According to Pennington (1996, p.89), “*vowels can be distinguished definitionally from consonants as having a relatively open aperture of articulation*”. Coming back to consonants, it was mentioned they are produced by narrowing the airflow to different degrees as it flows through the oral tract, and on the contrary, vowel production is straightforward, as the unobstructed air flows through the oral tract (Delahunty and Garvey, 2010, p.98).

As Yule (2014, p. 33) stated, “*vowel sounds are produced with a relatively free flow of air, and they are all typically voiced*”.

The schwa /ə/ is the most common vowel in English, which appears purely and invariably in unstressed syllables (Knight, 2012, p.71). Czech speakers may have problems with the recognition of words that contain a schwa, as this vowel does not exist in the Czech language. Instrumental analysis shows that the English schwa sound is context-driven much more than any other vowel, therefore is considered as “*inherently unspecified for tongue position*” (Bates, 1995, p. 266–267)

In English pronunciation, there are also short and long vowels. Roach (2009, p.14) listed seven short vowels, including the schwa sound: /ə/ (as in ago), /ɪ/ (as in fish), /ʌ/ (as in cut), /ɒ/ (as in pot), /ʊ/ (as in push), /e/ (as in yes) and /æ/ (as in man). Long vowels are easy to recognize due to the symbol : representing the vowel length. The symbols for long vowels are as follows: ɪ: (as in meet), ɜ: (as in bird), ɑ: (as in car), ɔ: (as in saw), u: (as in soon) (Kang, et al., 2018, p. 114). Compared to English, Czech long and short vowels are the same sound, only the pronunciation duration changes. The duration of pronunciation of Czech vowels is also slightly longer than in English.

According to Delahunty and Garvey (2010), “*differences in vowel quality are produced by different shapes of the oral cavity*” and the characteristic vowel qualities are controlled by:

- The height of the tongue (distinguishing high, mid, and low vowels)
- The part of the tongue raised (distinguishing front and back vowels)
- The lips position (rounded or unrounded lips)
- The tension of the oral tract muscles (distinguishing tense and lax vowels)

All these features, such as a specific configuration of the tongue, lips, and oral cavity, are constant and belong to an articulatory description. Vowels that are made this way are called monophthongs, and vowels involving a change in the configuration of the mouth are called diphthongs (Delahunty and Garvey, 2010, p.104). “*The word ‘monophthong’ comes from Greek, with mono meaning ‘one’, and phthong meaning ‘sound’*” (Knight, 2012, p. 64). From this, the diphthongs’ definition can be certainly derived.

According to Roach (2008, pp. 14-19) in his book *English Phonetics and Phonology*, there are eleven monophthongs: [ɪ], [i:], [e], [ɜ:], [æ], [ʌ], [ɑ:], [ɒ], [ɔ:], [ʊ], [u:].

The symbols for diphthongs are eɪ (as in wait), əʊ (as in show), eə (as in hair), ɔɪ (as in boy), ɪə (as in here), aʊ (as in how), ʊə (as in cure), aɪ (as in my) (Knight, 2012, p. 74).

Similarly, Kelly (2004, p.31-36) explored vowel sounds, however, he divided them into three categories:

- Closed vowel sounds: (/i:/, /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /u:/).
- Mid vowel sounds (/e/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/).
- Open vowel sounds (/æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ɒ/).

Additionally, Kelly (2004, p.35) also presented diphthongs as the combination of two vowel sounds, and based on the articulatory description categories of diphthong sounds are:

- Centering diphthongs (/ɪə/, /ʊə/, /eə/)
- Closing diphthong ending in /ɪ/ (/eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aɪ/)
- Closing diphthong ending in /ʊ/ (/əʊ/, /aʊ/)

Roach (2012, p. 23) added that the most complex English vowel are the triphthongs. For Czech learners, triphthongs are often difficult to pronounce, and very difficult to recognize. Producing triphthong means continuously producing three different vowels. It is a glide from one vowel to another and then to a third. Triphthong composition involves five closing diphthongs with schwa /ə/. Roach (2012, p.23) lists the triphthongs /eɪə/

(as in layer, player), /aɪə/ (as in liar, fire), /ɔɪə/ (as in loyal, royal), /əʊə/ (as in lower, mower), and /aʊə/ (as in power, hour).

## 2.4 Suprasegmental features

On the other hand, suprasegmental features (also called prosodic features) are what distinguishes human speech from the artificial speech of machines. Suprasegmentals are what make sounds sound natural to a human ear.

Prosody is a combination of suprasegmental features which are superimposed on syllables, such as stress variations, pitch, and length, although length variations can affect single segments of speech too (Ladefoged, 2011). Together these features form connected speech. The following section focuses on the English prosodic system, where it is important to realise that features ordinarily combine with one another.

A division of suprasegmental pronunciation features can look like this:

Category based on the word level: word stress, reduction, assimilation, elision, and linking

Category based on the clause level: rhythm, sentence stress, and intonation

In most Czech future teachers of English courses, teachers incorporate the practice of stress, rhythm, intonation, and linking into the lessons aiming to improve pronunciation.

Many Czech learners struggle with suprasegmental features because they avoid exaggeration. According to Tomková (2008), English pronunciation sounds unnatural to them, and they do not want to sound affected. But when speaking English, exaggeration is needed, otherwise, it sounds flat and monotonous. Students have their native speech prosody deeply rooted in their brains; thus, it is difficult to adjust to a new system (Gilbert, 2008). Teachers should be able to offer students techniques on how to overcome this struggle. For that, the teacher must be highly educated and well-versed in the following pronunciation features.

## 2.4.1 Stress

In a *Study on the Ability of SupraSegmental and Segmental Aspects in English Pronunciation*, Lasi (2020) points out three important stress levels:

- Word level – multisyllabic words have one or more syllables that are stressed
- Sentence level – the most important words tend to be stressed
- Contrastive stress – the most important words carry greater stress

Underhill (2005, p. 51-54) defines word stress as “*accent or emphasis given to a particular syllable of a word.*” Every word has its own stress pattern and incorrect stress placement could significantly affect one’s understanding (Scrivener, 2011, p. 277). Native speakers of English stress syllables instinctively without any specific knowledge about stress (Carr, 2013, p. 164).

Sentence stress is another level of stress, where speakers give significance to a particular word in an utterance (Kenworthy, 1987, p.32). Yates (2002, p.2) endorses Kenworthy’s explanation by claiming that “*the most important words tend to be stressed.*”

According to Collins and Mees (2013, p.129), “*in English, four phonetic variables appear most significant as indicators of stress: intensity, pitch variation, vowel quality and vowel duration*”.

Generally, English and Czech stress differ in strength, placement and function (Ondráček, 2014, p.39). English is a stress-timed language and gives more importance to stress than Czech, which is syllable-timed. To sum up, English stress differs from Czech in three main factors: it is stronger (especially in the case of stressed and unstressed syllables); it can be found in any position within a word (whereas in Czech it is always put at the beginning; it has a distinctive function (English stress distinguish the different meaning of words, such as /'rekɔ:d/ as a

noun versus /rɪ'kɔ:d/ as a verb; in Czech, stress only indicates the beginning of a new word).

## 2.4.2 Rhythm

Underhill (2005, p. 176) defines rhythm as *“the perception of some kind of underlying regularity of occurrence of prominences and word stresses.”*

People learn the rhythm of their native language very early in life, meaning when learning a second language, they are predisposed to use the rhythm of their first language. Thus, Czech future teachers of English awareness of the English rhythm system is necessary. When starting pronunciation teaching, Underhill's (2005, p.180) advice is to follow the rhythm of the rhymes, because that way learners sound English very quickly.

Roach (1983) mentions the general dependence of the English rhythm on strong and weak syllables, which leads learners back to already mentioned sentence stress, which is closely tied to the rhythm.

As Low (2015) adds, there are five factors that impact English rhythm:

- Stress (by the prominence of syllables or words, where the length, loudness, and pitch increases).
- Vowel quality.
- Syllable structure.
- Accent.
- Pauses.

## 2.4.3 Intonation

Intonation is the underlying feature speakers express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. As Kelly (2000, p.86) says, we perceive intonation, understand it, and use it without having to examine the intricacies of everything said or heard.

To learn about intonation, two significant terms must be acknowledged. These terms are pitch and tone. In relation to intonation, pitch changes to high or low by altering the vocal cords' frequencies (Knight, 2012, p. 229). The tone is *“the overall behaviour of the pitch”* (Roach, 2009, pp. 120-121).

English tones can be divided into four categories:

- The falling tone.
- The rising tone.
- The falling-rising tone.
- The rising-falling tone.

As Car (2013, pp.236-237) describes it, the falling tone is the “*transition from a higher to a lower pitch*” and in the terms of the rising tone, it functions the other way around; the rise-fall tone is where “*the pitch rises and then falls*” and vice versa for the fall-rise tone.

Teaching intonation appears to be rather complicated. In the case of intonation, Underhill (2005, p. 74-75) stated “*it is not what you say, but the way you say it.*” Ondráček (2014, p.46) claims that mistakes in intonation are perceived as worse than mistakes in individual segments. Intonation errors are not expected by native speakers. Additionally, Underhill (2005, p.75) mentions that a choice of intonation can be subjective, thus it is rather difficult to teach.

## 2.4.4 Linking

Together with assimilation (when a speech sound becomes similar or identical to a neighbouring sound) and elision (deletion of a phoneme), linking is an aspect of a connected speech.

The English language joins phonological words together in order to process smooth and fluent speech. Words can be linked together in several ways. According to Ondráček (2014, p. 43), there are three types of linking: consonant-vowel linking, a linking and an intrusive /r/, and a linking /w/ and /j/.

Linking a word that ends with a consonant to a word that begins with a vowel is very usual, e.g when “**an orange**” becomes “**anorange**” in one’s utterance. Sometimes, adding consonants j, w, and r needs to be added in the linking process (Low, 2015, p. 81). Once again, the added consonants are called intrusive (Cruttenden, 2014).

Zemková (2018) points out “*in Czech, there is no such linking; a Czech speaker of English can make the mistake of inserting glottal stops in between individual words, making the speech sound very unnatural.*” Therefore, awareness of the English connected speech system is crucial.

### 3 Pronunciation learning and teaching

This chapter focuses on studies on learning and teaching pronunciation at schools. *“Pronunciation is a central component of the second language acquisition of oral skills”* (MacDonald, 2002) where grammar and vocabulary skills are required, but each word or phrase must be pronounced correctly. *“Students should focus on achieving successful and intelligible pronunciation”* (Sahatsathatsana, 2017). *“Learning pronunciation is greatly important for intelligible oral communication”* (Gilakjani, 2012).

Yet, as was already mentioned in the first chapter, regardless of the importance of pronunciation in learners' effective communication, many teachers pay more attention to grammar and lexicon teaching and often neglect pronunciation teaching (Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Teachers who are non-native speakers are predominantly insecure about their own pronunciation, thus they pay more attention to practising other language skills such as grammatical structures (Henderson et al. 2012). They feel more secure about teaching grammar and lexicon than pronunciation, and many of them fear that they do not possess adequate skills to help their students (Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Learning pronunciation is greatly important for intelligible oral communication (Gilakjani, 2012), therefore it should be part of English lessons. Teachers should include all disciplines of the language.

#### 3.1 Approaches

The main theme of this subchapter is different ways of approaching EFL pronunciation teaching. When teaching pronunciation, it is necessary to decide what type of phonological structure to practice, and the first step may be the presentation of the smallest phonological structures (phonemes), and then proceeding to word and sentence stress, rhythm, intonation and linking which are more complex features.

However, these mentioned aspects link together and work in association, so any teacher or lector of a foreign language course should keep that in mind. As Marks and Bowen (2012,

p.11) claims, “*all aspects of pronunciation are needed right from the start*”. For successful pronunciation acquisition, learners should be taught that structures of the sound function inseparably. “*Ideally, a teacher is expected to explain the different components of pronunciation or the ‘building blocks’ and the way they are related to each other*” (Kirkova-Naskova, 2019).

In earlier studies, Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) discussed two approaches: firstly, if the segmentals are taught first, learners will acquire the suprasegmentals subsequently without any further instructions, and the second idea says once the suprasegmental features are in place, the necessary segmental discriminations will follow accordingly. Atli and Bergil (2012) later concluded that pronunciation instructions highly influence students’ speaking ability, emphasising the fact that without instruction, EFL students struggle to acquire pronunciation skills.

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), addressed three approaches to pronunciation instruction:

- the intuitive-imitative approach,
- the analytic-linguistic approach,
- the integrative approach.

The intuitive-imitative approach always assumes the presence of native speakers and teaches pronunciation based on the learner’s ability to listen and imitate the sounds and rhythm without giving any explicit information. In the second approach, the analytic-linguistic, the teacher should point out specific aspects of pronunciation such as the position of the tongue, manner of articulation and place (Roohani, 2013). This approach uses the charts of the vocal tract, phonetic alphabet imitation, and listening and production as supplementary materials. Lastly, the integrative approach concentrates on rhythm, intonation, and stress, prioritizing the practice of these features over the phoneme and word level (Roohani, 2013).

No matter which approaches the teacher favours, the final choice should arise from the observed abilities of the language classroom or from the problems the teacher experienced with his/her learners.

Walker (2010, p.22) adds that different accents constitute speakers' identities that should be respected. However, "*whichever approach we take to teaching pronunciation, it has to make these two conflicting goals of intelligibility and identity compatible*" (Walker, 2010, p.22).

## 4 Influential factors in pronunciation learning

In foreign language acquisition, one may face certain problems. The main purpose of this chapter is to explore some of these problems and factors influencing pronunciation learning. The following subchapters deal with the most speculated elements.

### 4.1 Native language

When people are born, they are surrounded by the language of their country. This language becomes their mother tongue. The British/Australian linguist, Michael Halliday once stated: *“Opinions differ regarding the uniqueness of the mother tongue for very many people...no language ever completely re-replaces the mother tongue. Certain kinds of ability seem to be particularly difficult to acquire in a second language”* (Halliday 1978, pp. 199–200).

As babies, people imitate what they hear and learning their first language comes naturally. However, it is scientifically proven that a child of ten years old or less can learn any language perfectly, but after that age, their gift of imitation slowly fades and mastering a foreign language becomes more difficult (J.D. O’Connor, 1970, p.2). The reason why pronouncing a foreign language is never easy is the distinctive habits and rules of the native language. Picking up a new language later in life means teaching one’s tongue different movements than it has been used to.

There is a significant difference between child language acquisition and adult language acquisition; a child is given only one specific system of language to learn, whereas for an adult there are two systems involved which are in competition with each other (Davies, 2003, p.36). Naturally, this relearning process comes with challenges. The native language can cause errors. When unsure about the correct pronunciation, learners tend to use a substitution of the nearest equivalence in the native language (Ur, 2012).

## 4.1.1 Czech versus English pronunciation

When comparing Czech to English pronunciation, one can find numerous differences. Many linguists explored this topic, including Sandy Millin (2011), and Alena Skaličková in her books about phonetics and phonology (1961, 1974, 1982). Both authors provided a clear overview of these differences and the most common problems of Czech learners. Many of their conclusions are presented in this subchapter.

According to Skaličková (1974, 5), English and Czech sounds differ not only in their realization and articulation basis but also in their function, use and distribution within specific language systems. A good teacher should pay attention to mutual differences and similarities and observe the sound form of both languages.

Skaličková (1961, pp. 15-17) lists the major differences between the Czech and English speech sounds:

- English articulation is less dynamic than Czech articulation. In Czech, speech organs work more actively (e.g. span and movement of jaws and lips, pronunciation of unstressed syllables, etc.). Furthermore, when pronouncing long vowels, articulation organs are rather fixed in their position, whereas in English, their pronunciation glides towards the end and they tend to be diphthongized.
- Due to assimilation, elision or linking, the beginning of speech is sharper in Czech and softer in English.
- The quality of stressed and unstressed syllables is different – in Czech, both stressed and unstressed syllables contain a fully pronounced vowel, whereas English vowels within unstressed syllables are usually reduced in their pronunciation as only /ə/ and /ɪ/ appears.
- English stress is different from Czech, which is described in Chapter 2.4.1.
- Czech speakers of English have difficulty using weak forms of common words such as “of, a, can” – they tend to place equal stress on all the words in a sentence, which later causes problems in comprehension (Millin, 2011).
- English consonants are different from Czech consonants since there are some that do not have their equivalent in Czech (such as /ð/ and /θ/). According to Millin (2011), this pushes Czech learners to replace them with similar sounds which

do not involve putting the tongue in the correct way (between the teeth). Czech learners tend to substitute /d/ or /dz/ for /ð/ and /f/ or /s/ for /θ/.

- As described in Chapter 2, Skaličková (1961) similarly points out there are many differences in the sound of speech, such as in rhythm and intonation. Millin (2011) comments that English intonation patterns have a much wider range which often makes Czech English sound a little lower than where it needs to be to sound in tune.

## 4.2 Phonetic ability (aptitude)

Phonetics ability as a skill *has been variously termed ‘aptitude for oral mimicry’, ‘phonetic coding ability’ or ‘auditory discrimination ability’* (Ambalegin,2018). Not everyone is a talented speaker. Linguistic gifts and talents may appear in teachers’ classrooms; however, it needs to be considered some may struggle. Even the aptitude for speaking a foreign language can be weak.

It has been confirmed language aptitude is one of the most important individual difference variables in second language acquisition (Cochran et al. 2010). Not only teachers but pronunciation curriculum should be sensitive and compatible with such aptitude differences (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Carroll (1965, 1981) shares the belief that some learners are relatively weak in phonemic coding ability, which he describes as *“the capacity to discriminate and code foreign sounds.”*

Some may hesitate if differences in phonetic ability do not only root in poor phonological awareness. However, in the *Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching* Ambalegin (2018) proved that *“some people are able to discriminate between two sounds better than others, and/or are able to mimic sounds more accurately.”*

## 4.3 Exposure to the language

Undoubtedly, the more exposed a person is to the target language, the more that person acquires. As Krashen (1982) stated in his language learning theory, prior to any language acquisition the input learners receive determines how much they acquire language. Hence, before being required to speak, students need to receive large amounts of perceptible input in the first place (Krashen, 1982).

It is generally believed that improving English language skills relies on surrounding learners with English not only in but out of the classroom. As a matter of the fact, language exposure generally refers to contact outside the classroom.

Benson (2001) defined this exposure as *“any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning.”*

Mentioned influential factors, however, are not the only troubles non-native speakers face when learning English pronunciation.

*“At first glance, it looks as though learning second language pronunciation should be easy: a simple matter of imitating the pronunciation of native speakers. In practice, of course, the reality is quite different”* (Fraser, 2006, p. 82). Future teachers, especially, must pay attention to as problematic parts of pronunciation as possible.

When listing different difficulties in pronunciation of non-native speakers of English, J.D. O'Connor (1970) stated that to win over the problematic factors, *“the only reliable guide is a critical ear, and, if possible, a good teacher.”* Teachers should serve as good models.

## 5 Strategies to improve pronunciation

Derived from the last chapter, pronunciation teaching and learning is a complex task and needs to be approached systematically. To facilitate the whole process, the literature in the field of English pronunciation teaching offers a variety of teaching techniques and strategies to not only learn but also improve pronunciation. This chapter points out and explores some of the most common and advised strategies that were found helpful when learning English as a second language. Future teachers of English may be using them, however, that will be investigated in the empirical part.

### 5.1 Imitation

Kirkova-Naskova (2019) investigated the outcomes of imitation and stated that “*automatic repetition and imitation aims at gradual improvement and accurate speech production.*” The source however must be of good quality, e.g. experience lector or native speaker. The procedure is to first listen, then repeat with imitation, and finally say it in a different context.

Kelly (2003) agrees it is an important first step in understanding simple phonetic structures – a needed basis for mastering more complex ones.

#### 5.1.1 Shadowing technique

Speech shadowing is viewed as an advanced language learning technique. It shares the procedure of imitation, which means listening to someone speaking and then trying to copy the sounds they made. More specifically, the advisable steps are: select the piece of audio, listen carefully, practice shadowing, record yourself and finally listen to the recording for feedback. When it comes to speaking fluently and accurately, practice is the key.

Oxford House (2016) explains, if the aim is to reach a high proficiency level, shadowing is a profitable strategy, because “*once you’ve mastered the skill of shadowing, not only will your*

*spoken fluency improve, but you'll also pick up more natural pronunciation and intonation.*”

The best possible option is to use audio featuring native speakers (DanSenSei English, 2022). Learners can watch movies, news or videos in English, or listen to English podcasts. The basic skill of shadowing is to follow the utterance produced by native speakers as closely as possible (Luo, Yamauchi & Minematsu 2010).

## 5.1.2 Singing

Songs as a valuable tool is a phenomenon recognized a long time ago. Songs have been considered a useful tool in pronunciation learning and teaching of non-native speakers by many researchers (e.g., Montaner, 2006; Nobre-Oliveira, 2007; Simpson, 2015).

Generally, a song includes lyrics which may be the basis for listening comprehension exercises, as well as for reading comprehension. Furthermore, songs not only improve listening, Ashtian and Zafarghandi (2015) proved songs also support better speech production. In the terms of pronunciation, songs serve as phonetic-phonological training.

Singing songs facilitates articulation training and it helps the learner correctly locate word stress. Music also helps to show rhythm and intonation (Betti, 2012). Since songs usually include repetitions, they can consequently improve learners' phonetic skills in the target language (Betti, 2012).

## 5.2 Pronunciation applications

The evolution of technology interferes with teaching and learning English pronunciation. Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019) mention that *“technology holds great potential for pronunciation training, particularly in terms of maximizing opportunities for practice and exposure to spoken language”* (p. 272). As any English learners, Czech future teachers of English may appreciate English pronunciation applications which facilitate their improvement.

A well-known Czech teacher of English, among Czech students, is Bronislav Sobotka. Sobotka (2020) admitted that he struggled with correct English pronunciation during

his studies. Currently, Sobotka helps Czech learners of English to overcome different obstacles via his online courses, articles, books, and videos. In one of Sobotka's (2021) books, he listed a few useful applications for improving pronunciation:

- ELSA Speak “World’s Best English Pronunciation App”
- SpeechAce
- Forvo
- BBC Learning English

According to Sobotka (2021), the use of mentioned application is very beneficial because firstly, it introduces the correct pronunciation by a native speaker, next, the applications ask the learner to repeat it, and finally, it gives the learner feedback. Feedback is crucial for any learner.

To conclude the theoretical part, teaching English pronunciation to Czech students means a great deal of studying the language, focus, readiness, patience, and hard work. Czech future teachers of English need to not only have the adequate pronunciation but also to understand it to be able to mentor others. And as Skaličková (1982) stated, *“to understand the speech mechanisms by which a foreign language differs from our mother tongue, we need to know both the general laws of speech production and the specific features of our own language”*.

# Empirical part

## 6 Methodology

The empirical part of the project deals with the methodology and analysis of the online questionnaire survey, which was created for the purposes of this project. The reason for selecting this research method was to investigate Czech future teachers' attitudes and self-assessment in the terms of pronunciation and to explore what strategies Czech future teachers of English use. Given the intended number of respondents, a questionnaire was a suitable choice.

The research was conducted at two selected universities, one in the Olomouc Region and the second in the South-Moravia Region.

The main aim of the project was to gain insights into strategies to improve pronunciation, used by Czech future teachers of English. What strategies do Czech future teachers of English use and how effective do they find certain strategies to improve English pronunciation? Do Czech teachers of English combine different kinds of strategies? Teachers should be proficient at their job, but how high is the awareness of the importance of pronunciation among Czech future teachers of English?

### 6.1 Research method

As a research method for the empirical part of the project, a questionnaire was selected. The questionnaire consists of sixteen questions in total, with thirteen close-ended, and three open-ended questions. Twelve of the close-ended questions are based on the respondent's evaluation. Respondents expressed their opinions using rating scales of 1-10. At the end of the research, the data analysis was based on Gavora's (2000) methodology. The rating scales were handled as a continuum to get an average popularity rate.

The platform used for creating the questionnaire was Survio.com. The questionnaire was distributed online via a hyperlink sent to an e-mail or posted on a common virtual platform. For better comprehensibility, the questionnaire was constructed in the Czech language.

## 7 Respondents

Respondents to the questionnaire were Czech future teachers of English. The number of respondents was slightly higher than intended, with a total of 78 respondents.

## 8 Questionnaire analysis

### Question No.1

The first item of the questionnaire was designed to expose Czech future teachers of English opinions on the importance of pronunciation. Mainly to see whether they realise it is one of the significant aspects when becoming English teachers.

There were forty-eight respondents who chose the highest possible rating of 10/10 on the teacher's correct pronunciation importance. Twenty respondents chose 9/10, seven respondents rated this matter as 8/10, two respondents as 7/10, and the last respondent chose a 5/10 rating. No respondent chose a rating lower than 5/10. The average rating is therefore 9.4., indicating that Czech future teachers of English are aware of the importance of correct pronunciation (see Figure 1).

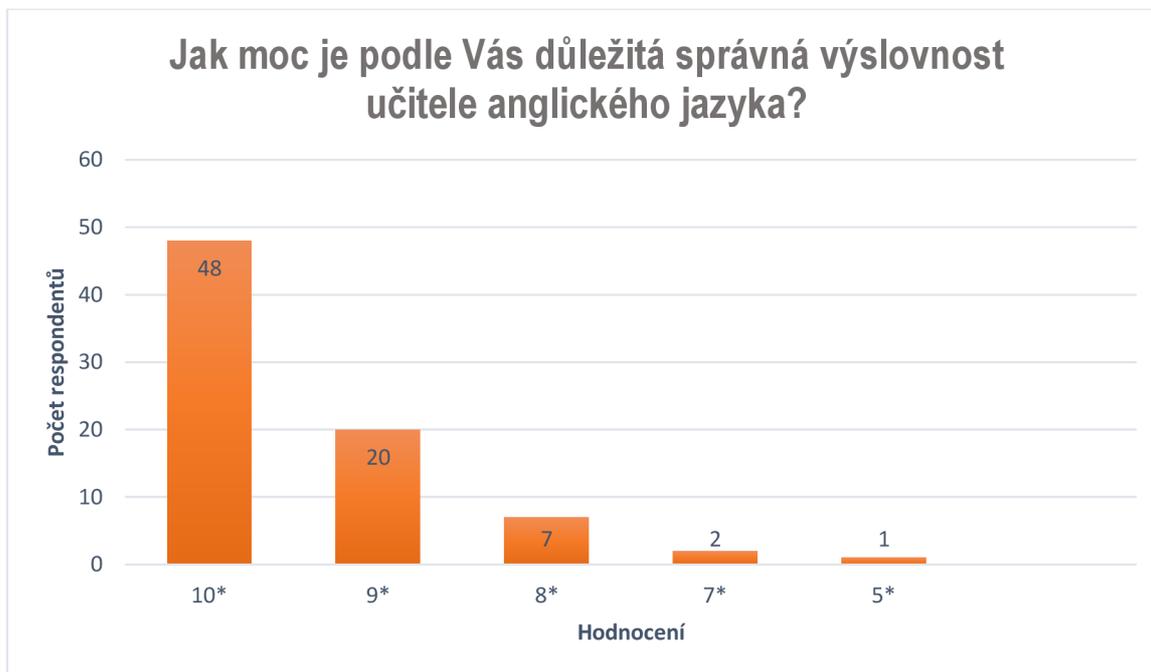


Figure 1: The importance of correct pronunciation.

## Question No.2

The second questionnaire item asks respondents to what extent are they dedicated to improving their own pronunciation

. In the theoretical part of this thesis, it was mentioned that the teacher should model pronunciation and therefore work on it. According to answers to Question No.2, many Czech future teachers of English actively work on their pronunciation to improve it. The average rating is 7.6/10. However, four respondents' attitude to their own pronunciation skills is rather passive (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Improving respondents' own pronunciation.

### Question No.3

The third questionnaire item depends on Czech future teachers of English self-assessment. It aims to find out how they feel about their own pronunciation of phonemes.

Phonemes are introduced in this thesis when exploring the IPA Chart (see Chapter 2.2.), which was presented to any Czech future teacher of English during his or her studies to learn the correct pronunciation. Given that fact, respondents' answers were expected to be positive. After the analysis, the average rating of this item is 7.4/10. As expected, most respondents do not feel pessimistic about their pronunciation of English phonemes (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Self-assessment - pronunciation.

## Question No.4

In the fourth question, respondents were asked about the extent to which they are comfortable with the use of English stress in their utterances. Czech and English stress differs (see Chapter 2.4.1.), thus some Czech learners of English are insecure about its use. Even though most respondents rated their use of stress rather positively, as the average rating is 7.1/10, fifteen respondents feel rather negatively (see Figure 4), which confirms the previous claim.

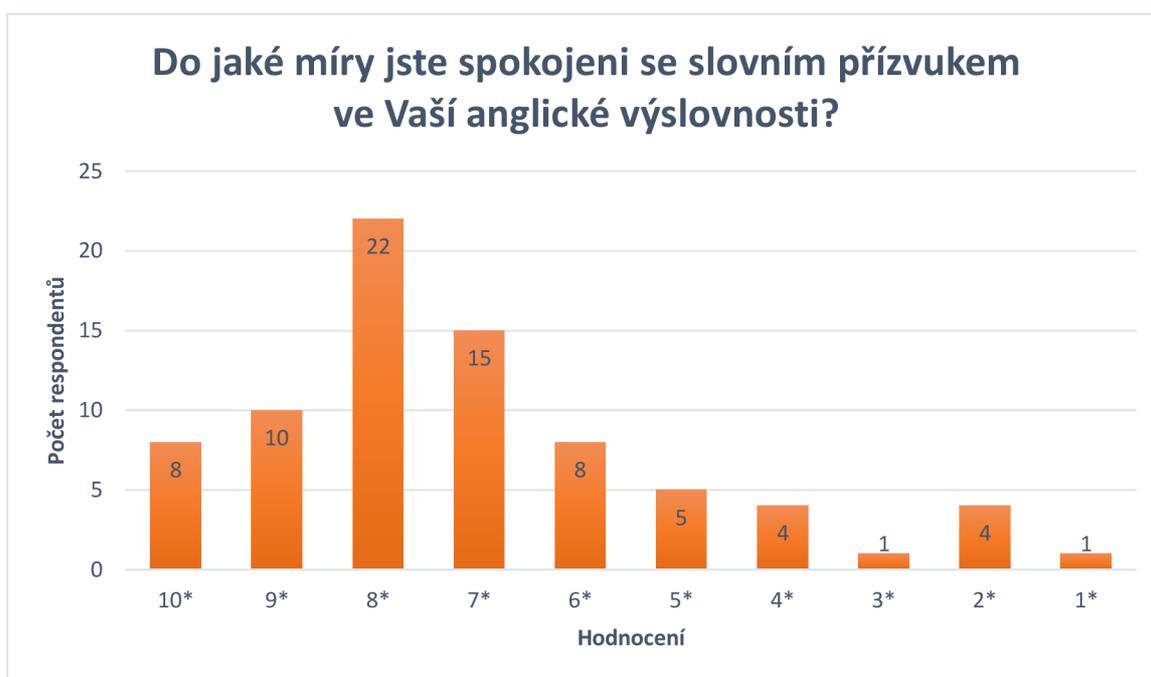


Figure 4: Self-assessment - English stress in utterances.

## Question No.5

Self-assessment of respondents' use of English rhythm is another question of the survey. Rhythm is introduced in the theoretical part of the thesis (see Chapter 2.4.2.) as a feature that needs to be practised. According to the average rating, which is 5.7, the practice seems inevitable. Only thirteen of seventy-eight Czech future teachers of English chose the highest 10/10 rating (see Figure 5).

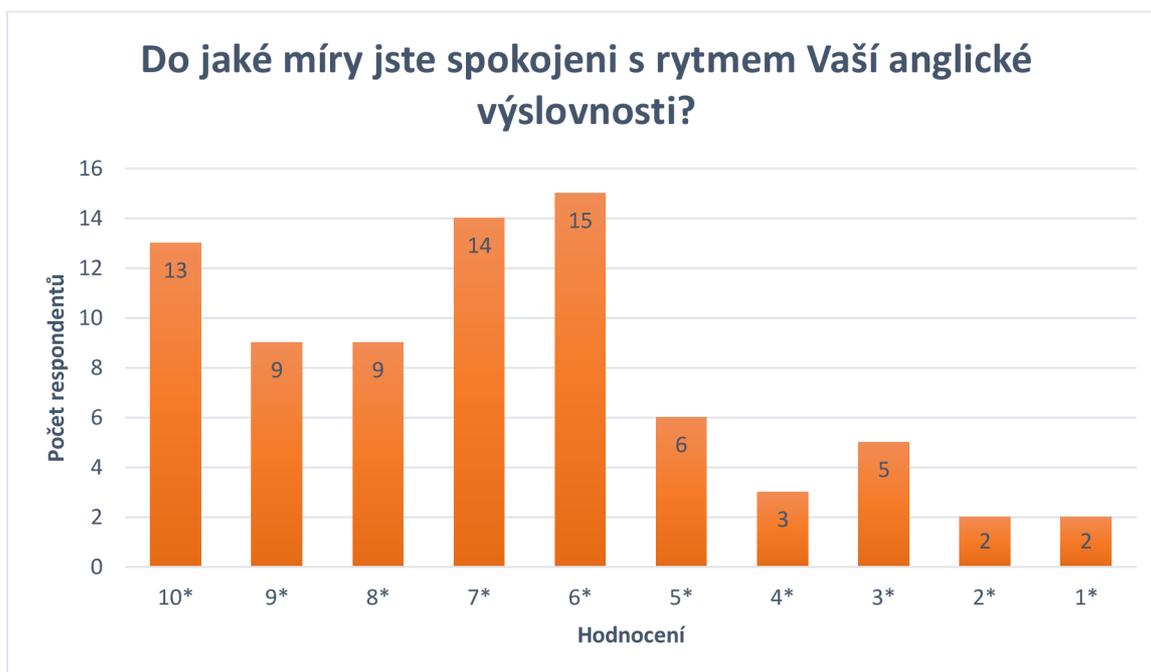


Figure 5: Self-assessment-use of English rhythm.

## Question No.6

The sixth question aims to assess respondents' intonation. Their self-assessment showed rather positive feelings, as the average rating score is 7.3/10. However, eleven respondents rated their English intonation skills below the score of 5/10 (see Figure 6). As the results show, some Czech future teachers of English still need to improve their pronunciation.



Figure 6: Self-assessment - English intonation.

## Question No.7

How do Czech future teachers feel about their use of linking in spoken English? Even though there is no such linking in the Czech language (see Chapter 2.4.4.), the average rating of Czech future teachers of English is rather high. To be exact, it is 7.3/10. Yet, nine respondents consider the use of linking problematic, as their choice was lower than 5/10 (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Self-assessment - linking in spoken English.

## Question No.8

The eighth question stands on the self-evaluation of the overall sound of their English pronunciation. The theoretical part of the thesis discussed numerous problems when acquiring English pronunciation. The results of Question No.8 confirm that Czech future teachers of English face certain problems. There are respondents who are not satisfied with their own English pronunciation and whose self-assessment is rather negative (see Figure 8). However, the average rating is 7.4/10.

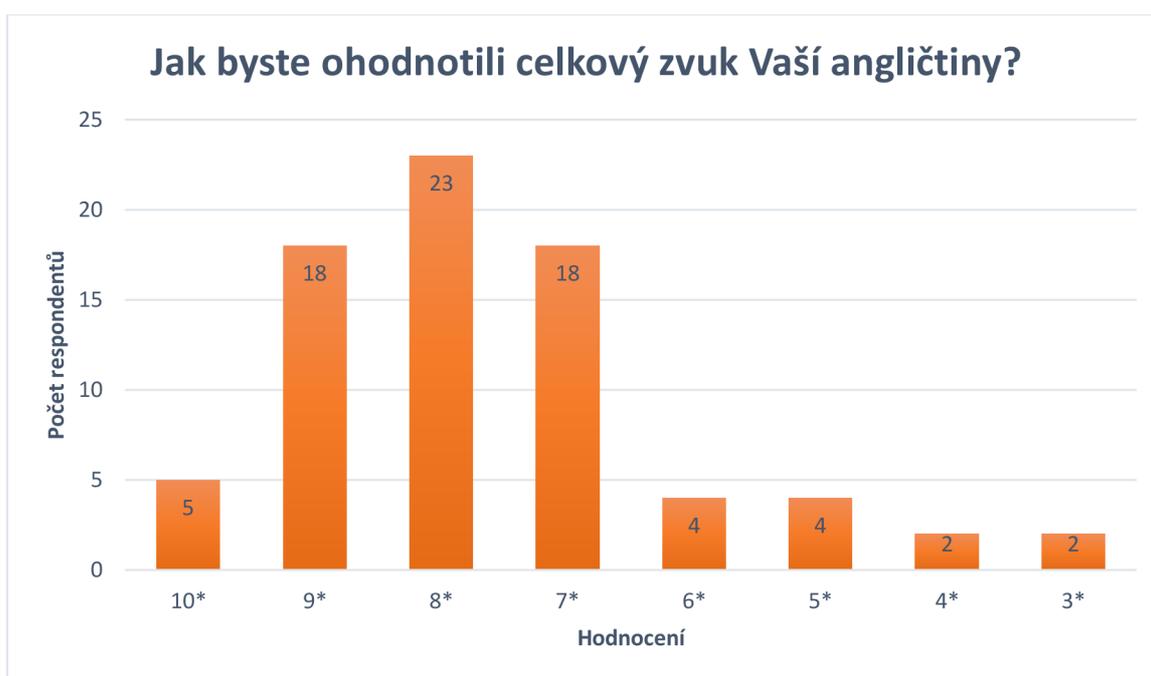


Figure 8: Self-assessment - overall sound.

## Question No.9

In the ninth item of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they have studied phonetics. Phonetics is an important subject that Czech future teachers of English need to acknowledge. As mentioned in the theoretical part, English teachers must master certain competencies including linguistic competence (see Chapter 1.3). The results show that phonetics is included in respondents' courses. Only nine of the seventy-eight respondents claim they have not studied phonetics (see Figure 9).

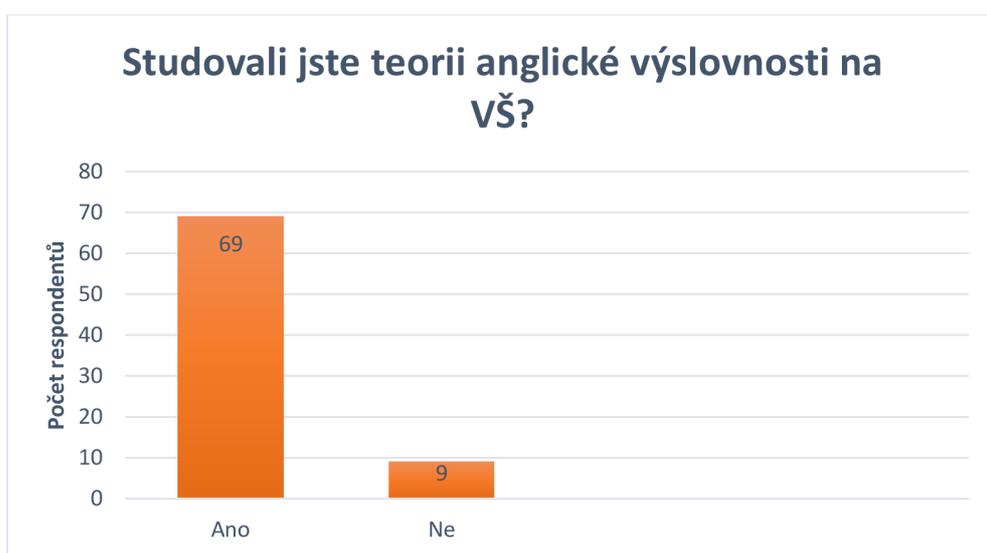


Figure 9: Was phonetics taught at the university.

## Question No.10

The tenth questionnaire item is connected to Question No.9, as it focuses on the outcomes of phonetics classes. Given the results, phonetics classes relatively helped to improve pronunciation. However, for some reason rather disagree (see Figure 10). The average rating of phonetics classes' contribution is 6.2/10.

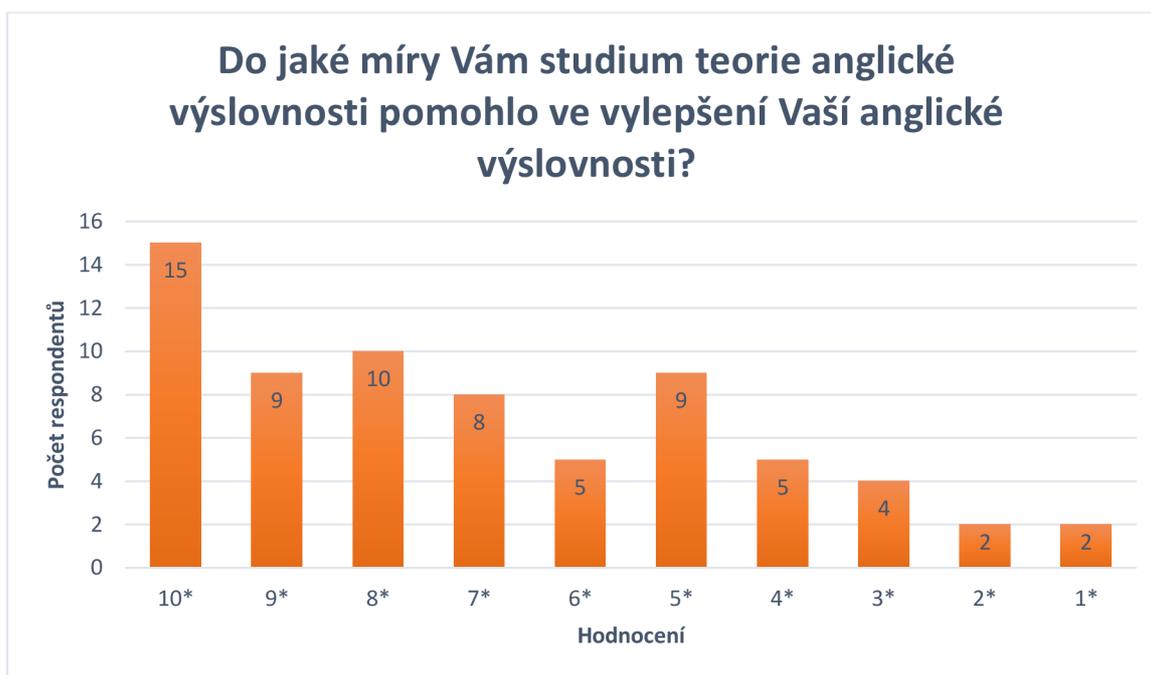


Figure 10: Outcomes of phonetics classes.

## Question No.11

Questionnaire item no. 11 asks about the effectiveness of watching English films or videos in relation to pronunciation improvement. Using English audio is mentioned when introducing the strategy of imitation of native speakers, and the shadowing technique (see Chapter 5.1.1.). Thus, it needs to be pointed out, that in order to improve pronunciation, watching English films or videos should be combined with the following imitation. The average rating on the effectiveness of the mentioned strategy is 7.9/10.



Figure 11: Effective strategy - watching English films or videos.

## Question No.12

The twelfth question was aimed at Czech future teachers of English opinions on using songs to improve English pronunciation. Is it an effective strategy? The theoretical part of the thesis discusses songs as a strategy to improve English pronunciation in Chapter 5.2. Many respondents agree and consider singing English songs an effective strategy (see Figure 12). The average rating on its effectiveness is 7.7/10.



Figure 12: Effective strategy - using English songs.

## Question No.13

Is imitating native speakers considered an effective strategy? To what extent?

According to respondents, this strategy is more effective than the others from previous questions (See Questions No.11 & No.12). The average rating used for imitating native speakers is 8.5/10. The imitation is highly advised, as described in Chapter 5.1.

With a few exceptions (see Figure 13), the answers correspond to the theoretical part.



Figure 13: Effective strategy - Imitating native speakers.

## Question No.14

In your opinion and experience, what are the most effective strategies for improving English pronunciation? The fourteenth questionnaire item was aimed at future teachers' strategies to improve their English pronunciation. Respondents were given the opportunity to present their examples of effective strategies to improve English pronunciation. To find out as many strategies as possible, the question was open-ended. However, the respondents' ideas were altogether similar, and they repeatedly mentioned the same strategies as others. The results of question No. 14 show that in the respondents' opinions and experiences, the most effective strategy to improve their pronunciation is imitation. 25.6% of the respondents mentioned the strategy of imitation and 11.5% mentioned the combination of imitation with other strategies.

| <i><b>Otázka</b></i>   | <b>Odpovědi</b>  | <b>%</b> |
|--|--|----------|
| <i>Co je dle Vašeho názoru a zkušenosti nejefektivnějšími strategiemi pro zlepšení anglické výslovnosti?</i> | Imitace  | 25,6 %   |
|  | Pobyt v anglicky mluvících zemích                          | 15,4 %   |
|  | Sledování filmů a seriálů                                  | 14,1 %   |
|  | Kombinace všech strategií, které byly zmíněny v dotazníku  | 11,5 %   |
|  | Kontakt s rodilým mluvčím                                  | 11,5 %   |
|  | Teoretická znalost fonetiky jazyka v kombinaci s tréninkem | 10,3 %   |
|  | Co nejvíce mluvit  | 10,3 %   |
|  | Poslech  | 9 %      |
|  | Shadowing/echoing  | 3,8 %    |

*Table 1: Strategies for pronunciation improvement.*

## Question No.15

What makes the process of learning/improving your English pronunciation difficult? This questionnaire item aimed to find out the struggles of Czech future teachers of English in their own pronunciation learning. English pronunciation is a very broad and time-consuming discipline, especially if other obstacles must be considered. 24.6% of the respondents claim they cannot work on their pronunciation properly due to the lack of time (*see Figure 15*). Furthermore, respondents mentioned the lack of conversation in their classes (12.3%), the lack of conversation with a native speaker (10.5%), and the lack of their teachers' adequate competencies (7%). Other responses to the questionnaire item confirmed difficulties caused by their mother tongue (15.8 %) and by the varieties of English pronunciation, such as models and accents (12.3 %) discussed in the theoretical part of the project. Given the “exaggeration” of English sound mentioned in the theoretical part, respondents admitted that one of the barriers they must overcome is their shyness (8.8 %), otherwise their English utterance sounds flat and monotonous.

| <b>Otázka</b>   | <b>Odpovědi</b>   | <b>%</b> |
|---|---|----------|
| <i>Co Vám ztěžuje proces učení se/vylepšování anglické výslovnosti?</i> | Nedostatek času   | 24,6 %   |
|   | Mateřský jazyk a jeho rozdíly                                 | 15,8 %   |
|   | Nedostatek příležitosti konverzace v hodinách                 | 12,3 %   |
|   | Mnoho modelů, přízvuky a dialekty                             | 12,3 %   |
|   | Nedostatek kontaktu s rodilým mluvčím                         | 10,5 %   |
|   | Stud  | 8,8 %    |
|   | Pozdní začátek s teorií výslovnosti                           | 8,8 %    |
|   | Nedostačující kompetence učitele, který má špatnou výslovnost | 7 %      |

*Table 2: Obstacles in learning/improving pronunciation.*

## Question No.16

What would you add to the topic of English language teachers' pronunciation? In Question No.16, the respondents had the opportunity to present their ideas and opinions. The expected outcome was that Czech future teachers of English consider English pronunciation as an aspect of great importance. Given the results, 25 % of the respondents specifically stated “*pronunciation is very important*” in their responses. However, respondents confirmed that despite its importance, pronunciation is still being neglected (25.3 %) and that many English teachers have poor pronunciation (20.4 %). Teachers’ pronunciation influences their learners’ pronunciation (21.4 %), thus Czech future teachers of English realize they must work on it.

| <b>Otázka</b>  | <b>Odpovědi</b>  | <b>%</b> |
|--|--|----------|
| <i>Zde máte možnost doplnit cokoliv, co Vás napadne k tématu Výslovnost u učitelů anglického jazyka.</i> | Výslovnost je velmi důležité téma.   | 25,6 %   |
|  | Výslovnost je u učitelů AJ velice zanedbávané a opomíjené téma.  | 25,3 %   |
|  | Výslovnost učitele ovlivňuje výslovnost žáka a budoucí učitelé anglického jazyka by proto na své výslovnosti měli intenzivně pracovat. | 21,4 %   |
|  | Spousta učitelů má špatnou výslovnost.   | 20,4 %   |
|  | Budoucí učitelé by měli do své výuky výslovnost zařadit více.  | 7,3 %    |

Table 3: Final thoughts.

## 9 Conclusion

The theoretical part of the thesis dealt with English pronunciation's place in Czech education, with its features, and challenges, and with strategies to improve pronunciation that are advisable for Czech future teachers of English. Therefore, providing the theoretical background for the construction of the questionnaire that was selected as the research method in the empirical part.

The questionnaire was aimed exclusively at Czech future teachers of English since the main aim of the project was to gain insights into strategies to improve pronunciation in Czech future teachers of English. Three research objectives were designed to help achieve the main purpose.

The first research objective was to examine the approaches towards pronunciation and towards the importance of pronunciation. To what extent are Czech future teachers of English aware of pronunciation issues? The results of the questionnaire survey showed that most of them consider pronunciation to be a very important aspect in English learning and teaching. In the case of approaching English pronunciation, 10.3 % of respondents mentioned a combination of phonetics theory and active training as one of the best strategies when improving pronunciation. The mentioned combination is close to the analytic-linguistic approach listed in Chapter 3.1. Furthermore, respondents to the questionnaire expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of possible training during their studies. In the questionnaire results, it was suggested that Czech future teachers of English should incorporate more pronunciation activities into their lessons.

The second research objective was to investigate obstacles and problems that are being faced when learning English pronunciation. What are the main differences between Czech and English a Czech learner must pay attention to? In the questionnaire results, respondents confirmed acquiring English is not effortless. There are many difficulties that make English pronunciation problematic. Respondents to the survey were not completely content with their overall pronunciation skills. They admitted, there are certain influential factors hindering their progress such as their mother tongue, lack of time, lack of input, or lack of their tutor's competencies. These results draw attention to aspects on which Czech future teachers need to focus and work.

The theoretical part of the project highlighted the importance of correct pronunciation and the need for adequate competencies of an English teacher. As indicated many times, practice is the key to success. Thus, training the pronunciation with the help of different kinds of strategies is prior to becoming a competent teacher of English.

The focus of the third objective was on exploring the strategies to improve Czech future teachers of English pronunciation and on examining the effectiveness of these strategies. What strategies to improve English pronunciation do Czech future teachers of English employ? As expected, the results of the questionnaire revealed, that Czech future teachers of English combine different kinds of strategies that are necessary for their own progress. According to the respondents' experiences, they evaluated the strategy of imitating a native speaker of English as the most effective strategy to improve English pronunciation. However, respondents also highlighted the high efficiency of combining more than one strategy.

From the overall results of the questionnaire can be concluded that Czech teachers of English realize the importance of pronunciation and therefore they use certain strategies to improve it. As the theoretical part of this thesis stated, pronunciation as an aspect of English teaching may be currently neglected, however, given the responses of Czech future teachers of English, it can be said that in a couple of years this will no longer be true. With the use of mentioned strategies, Czech future teachers of English will not only improve their skills. Moreover, they will be able to be competent guides, mentors, and models for their future students.

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## Appendix – Questionnaire

Vážené respondentky, vážení respondenti,

obracím se na Vás s prosbou o vyplnění mého dotazníku, který bude sloužit jako podklad pro vypracování bakalářské práce na téma "Strategie pro vylepšení výslovnosti budoucích českých učitelů anglického jazyka". Podmínkou tedy je, abyste byli budoucími učiteli anglického jazyka.

Tento dotazník je zaměřen především na Vaše vlastní názory a sebehodnocení. Na dané otázky prosím odpovídejte co nejpřesněji a pravdivě.

Vyplnění probíhá anonymně a je dobrovolné.

Předem moc děkuji za spolupráci!

Pavλίna Čechová – studentka Pedagogické fakulty UP v Olomouci

1 Jak moc je podle Vás důležitá správná výslovnost učitele anglického jazyka?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

2 Jak moc je podle Vás důležitá správná výslovnost učitele anglického jazyka?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

3 Jak moc je podle Vás důležitá správná výslovnost učitele anglického jazyka?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

4 Jak moc je podle Vás důležitá správná výslovnost učitele anglického jazyka?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

5 Do jaké míry aktivně pracujete na zlepšování své anglické výslovnosti?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

6 Do jaké míry jste spokojeni se svou vlastní výslovností anglických hlásek?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

7 Do jaké míry jste spokojeni se slovním přízvukem ve Vaší anglické výslovnosti?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

8 Do jaké míry jste spokojeni s rytmem Vaší anglické výslovnosti?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

9 Do jaké míry jste spokojeni s intonací ve Vaší vlastní výslovnosti anglického jazyka?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

10 Do jaké míry jste spokojeni s vázáním ve Vaší vlastní anglické výslovnosti?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

11 Jak byste ohodnotili celkový zvuk Vaší angličtiny?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

12 Studovali jste teorii anglické výslovnosti na VŠ?

Nápověda k otázce: *Vyberte jednu odpověď*

Ano  Ne

13 Do jaké míry Vám studium teorie anglické výslovnosti pomohlo ve vylepšení Vaší anglické výslovnosti?

Nápověda k otázce: *Pokud jste teorii výslovnosti nestudovali, otázku přeskočte.*

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

14 Určete efektivitu sledování anglických videí/filmů jako strategie pro vylepšení anglické výslovnosti

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

15 Určete efektivitu zpívání anglických písní jako strategie pro vylepšení anglické výslovnosti

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

16 Určete efektivitu imitace rodilých mluvčích jako strategie pro vylepšení anglické výslovnosti

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  / 10

17 Co je dle Vašeho názoru a zkušenosti nejefektivnějšími strategiemi pro zlepšení anglické výslovnosti?

18 Co Vám ztěžuje proces učení se/vylepšování anglické výslovnosti?

19 Zde máte možnost doplnit cokoliv, co Vás napadne k tématu Výslovnost u učitelů anglického jazyka.

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# Resumé

Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na přístupy a postoje k výslovnosti českých budoucích učitelů angličtiny, které pomohou získat poznatky o strategiích zlepšování výslovnosti u českých budoucích učitelů angličtiny. Pro účely tohoto projektu byl vytvořen dotazník. Analýza dotazníkového šetření ukázala, že ke zlepšení anglické výslovnosti je využíváno až několik strategií. Většina respondentů však považuje za nejúčinnější strategii pro vylepšení vlastní výslovnosti napodobování rodilých mluvčích.

# Anotace

|                     |                            |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Jméno a příjmení:   | Pavčina Čechová            |
| Katedra nebo ústav: | Ústav cizích jazyků        |
| Vedoucí práce:      | Mgr. Jana Kořínková, Ph.D. |
| Rok obhajoby:       | 2023                       |

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Název práce:               | Strategie pro vylepšení výslovnosti budoucích českých učitelů anglického jazyka   |
| Název práce v angličtině:  | Strategies to improve pronunciation in Czech future teachers of English   |
| Anotace práce:             | Tato práce se zabývá možnostmi, jak zlepšit výslovnost budoucích českých učitelů anglického jazyka a zákonitostmi anglické výslovnosti, které je tudíž potřeba znát. V praktické části práce bylo analyzované dotazníkové šetření, které bylo zaměřeno na různé strategie ke zlepšení výslovnosti a jejich efektivitu na základě zkušeností a názorů budoucích českých učitelů anglického jazyka.                             |
| Klíčová slova:             | Český budoucí učitel angličtiny, strategie k vylepšení výslovnosti, anglická výslovnost, důležitost výslovnosti, výslovnostní prvky   |
| Anotace práce v angličtině | This thesis deals with the strategies to improve the pronunciation of Czech future teachers of English and the aspects of English pronunciation, that need to be acknowledged. In the practical part of the thesis, a questionnaire survey was analysed to investigate different strategies to improve pronunciation and their effectiveness based on the experiences and opinions of future Czech English language teachers. |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Klíčová slova v angličtině: | Czech future teacher of English, strategies to improve pronunciation, English pronunciation, importance of pronunciation, pronunciation features |
| Přílohy vázané v práci:     | 1  |
| Rozsah práce:               | 73   |
| Jazyk práce:                | Anglický jazyk   |