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Beyond the IPA: Alternative Strategies for Teaching English in Primary School

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RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza el uso de la transcripción fonética adaptada al español como estrategia para mejorar la pronunciación del inglés en estudiantes de educación primaria. Se parte del reconocimiento de que los métodos tradicionales basados en repetición mecánica no garantizan la inteligibilidad ni la fluidez oral. La investigación se enmarca en un enfoque cuantitativo con diseño correlacional, aplicado a un grupo intacto de 42 estudiantes de quinto grado. Se utilizaron pruebas de lectura en voz alta y tareas de pronunciación, midiendo la fluidez a través de palabras correctas por minuto (WCPM) y la precisión con una rúbrica analítica. Los resultados muestran una mejora significativa entre el pretest y el postest ($p < .001$), con un incremento promedio de tres puntos y una reducción en la variabilidad de las puntuaciones. Estos hallazgos confirman que la estrategia de transcripción fonética alternativa favorece la precisión, la fluidez y la autoconfianza en la producción oral, aportando evidencia para su incorporación en la enseñanza de inglés en contextos escolares.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Palabras clave: pronunciación, respelling, enseñanza del inglés, fluidez oral, inteligibilidad.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of Spanish-based respelling as a pedagogical strategy to improve English pronunciation among primary school students. Traditional methods focused on mechanical repetition often fail to ensure intelligibility and fluency. The research was framed within a quantitative approach and a correlational design, conducted with an intact group of 42 fifth-grade students. Data collection involved oral reading tasks and pronunciation activities, with fluency measured through words correct per minute (WCPM) and accuracy assessed using an analytic rubric. The results indicate a statistically significant improvement between pre-test and post-test scores ($p < .001$), with an average gain of three points and reduced variability among learners. These findings confirm that alternative respelling strategies contribute to higher accuracy, greater fluency, and increased self-confidence in oral production. Therefore, respelling proves to be an effective and accessible resource for English language teaching in primary school contexts.

KEYWORDS

Keywords: pronunciation, respelling, English teaching, oral fluency, intelligibility

1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

Teaching pronunciation in primary education is an essential part of developing communicative competence in English, especially when the goal is to help students use the language effectively in real-life situations. However, in many schools, a traditional method is still used. This method focuses on mechanical repetition and memorization of isolated words, without making a clear connection between writing and sound. Although this practice may help students remember vocabulary, it does not ensure correct pronunciation in fluent speech or in complete sentences. As a result, students often produce fragmented, unclear speech with repeated mistakes.

To face this problem, respelling in Spanish appears as an innovative teaching strategy. It represents English sounds with familiar letters from the first language (L1). By reducing the gap between written form and oral production, this technique helps students recognize sound patterns, practice consciously, and reach better intelligibility in communication. Studies such as Demirezen (2020) show that using alternative spellings to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) improves listening perception and oral confidence. Similarly, Awramiuk and Citko (2020) point out that the lack of consistent spelling and prosodic marks in school materials limits phonological learning. More recently, Chaves Fernández, Gapper, and Sevilla Morales (2024) identified critical phonemes for Spanish speakers and suggested simplified representations useful in primary education. In primary settings, phonics-based instruction has also improved learners' intelligibility (Martínez, 2020). This gap highlights the need for low- cost, teacher-friendly support that demonstrably raises intelligibility in primary EFL classrooms.

From a learning-theory standpoint, timely, individualized feedback creates salient cues that help stabilize accurate articulatory routines; meta-analytic evidence shows that ASR-based pronunciation training with explicit corrective feedback yields reliable gains (Ngo, Chen, &

Lai, 2024). Current approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), World Englishes, and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) emphasize intelligibility and communicative use over native-like accent targets (Boonsamritphol & Rungrojsuwan, 2021).

Guided by this rationale, the present study asks two questions: To what extent does Spanish- based respelling improve the accuracy of English pronunciation in primary students? and What is the relationship between this strategy and oral fluency in communicative tasks? In line with these questions, **the general objective is to determine the extent to which Spanish-based respelling improves students' oral pronunciation in English—considering accuracy, fluency (WCPM), and overall intelligibility—within a quantitative pre–post design.**

2. MARCO TEÓRICO

Studies such as Demirezen (2020) show that using alternative spellings to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) improves listening perception and oral confidence. Similarly, Awramiuk and Citko (2020) point out that the lack of consistent spelling and prosodic marks in school materials limits phonological learning. More recently, Chaves Fernández, Gapper, and Sevilla Morales (2024) identified critical phonemes for Spanish speakers and suggested simplified representations useful in primary education. In primary settings, phonics-based instruction has also improved learners' intelligibility (Martínez, 2020). This gap highlights the need for low- cost, teacher-friendly support that demonstrably raises intelligibility in primary EFL classrooms.

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3. METODOLOGÍA

This study was framed within a quantitative approach, understood as one based on

objective measurement and statistical analysis to test hypotheses in second language research (Mackey & Gass, 2021). This perspective is suitable because it allows for a numerical description of the changes observed in pronunciation and determines whether they are statistically significant, thus providing solid foundations for pedagogical decision-making. Scores were collected before and after the intervention to evaluate its effect on reading aloud, fluency, and intelligibility.

The adopted design was correlational and examined statistical relationships between variables without manipulation. It focuses on measuring the strength and direction of associations, and can be applied within a single group to explore observed relationships without attempting to establish causality (Bhandari, 2023; Devi et al., 2023). Variables included reading fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and students' self-perception of oral competence, and correlational analyses were conducted to explore their interrelationships.

The target population consisted of primary school students. The study involved an intact class of 42 fifth graders (≈10 years old). Convenience sampling was employed, which limits generalization but was adequate given access and control of the intervention (Andrade, 2021).

Data collection relied on reading and pronunciation tasks that are sensitive to instructional effects in real classrooms. Oral reading fluency was measured in words correct per minute (WCPM) using one-minute timed passages, following Kim (2021). Procedures for monitoring oral reading and interpreting rate stability were aligned with recent work on extended reading contexts (Wang et al., 2024).

Pronunciation was assessed with controlled production tasks that targeted critical phonemes for Spanish-speaking learners. Pre- and post-tests captured changes in segmental accuracy and intelligibility, as recommended by Mora (2023). The selection of targets and task design drew on corpus-based insights into pronunciation learning (Ma and Luo, 2024), and practice activities considered evidence from web-based training on challenging clusters (Alsuhaibani et al., 2024).

The instruments included parallel reading test forms, WCPM, and an analytic

pronunciation rubric (0–4 scale). Equivalent A/B forms were applied; raters were trained with anchored criteria; and double scoring with consensus resolution was used when necessary to reinforce scoring consistency.

4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The results show a clear improvement in the students' performance after the intervention. In the pre-test, the participants reached an average score of 5.00, while in the post-test the average increased to 8.00. This means that, on average, students gained three more points after the learning process, which reflects a positive progress in their skills.

In addition, the minimum and maximum scores also changed in a favorable way. In the pre-test, some students only reached 2 points, while in the post-test all of them scored higher, reaching between 5 and 10 points. Even those who had the lowest results improved significantly.

To confirm whether this difference was truly significant and not just a random change, a comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores was made. The analysis showed that the difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$), which means that the improvement was not due to chance, but to the real impact of the intervention.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test

Measure	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	5.0	8.0
Std. Deviation	1.78	1.13
Minimum	2	5
Maximum	9	10

Median	5.0	8.0

The results show a clear improvement in student performance after the intervention. The mean increased from 5.0 to 8.0, indicating general progress across the group. The median also rose from 5.0 to 8.0, suggesting that most students improved consistently. The standard deviation decreased from 1.78 to 1.13, which means the scores became more stable and closer to the average. In addition, the minimum score increased from 2 to 5, showing that even the lowest-performing students made progress. The maximum score went from 9 to 10, indicating that

high achievers improved as well. Overall, these results reflect both academic improvement and greater consistency among the students' performance

Table 2

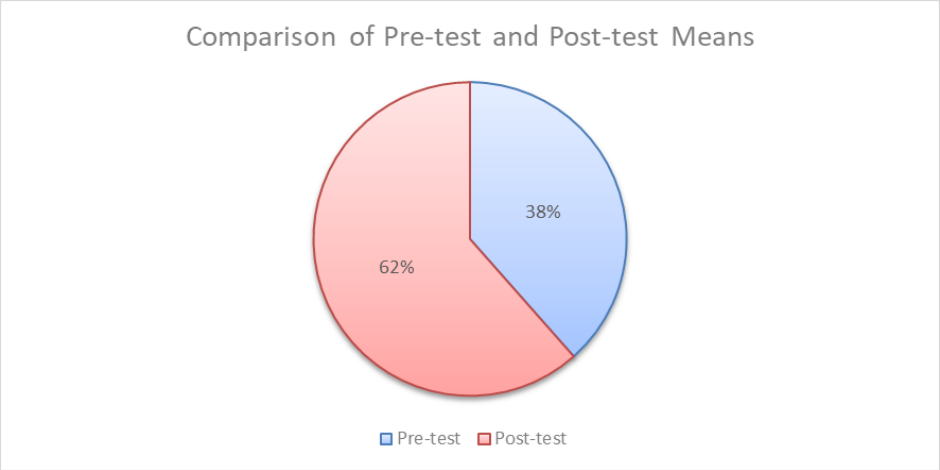
Results of the paired samples t-test

Statistic	Value
t	13.09
df	36
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00000

The t-test results indicate a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. The t value = 13.09 with 36 degrees of freedom (df) suggests a strong difference between the two means. Additionally, the p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.00000, which is far below the standard threshold of 0.05. This confirms that the improvement is not due to chance, but is statistically significant, supporting the effectiveness of the educational intervention.

Figure 1

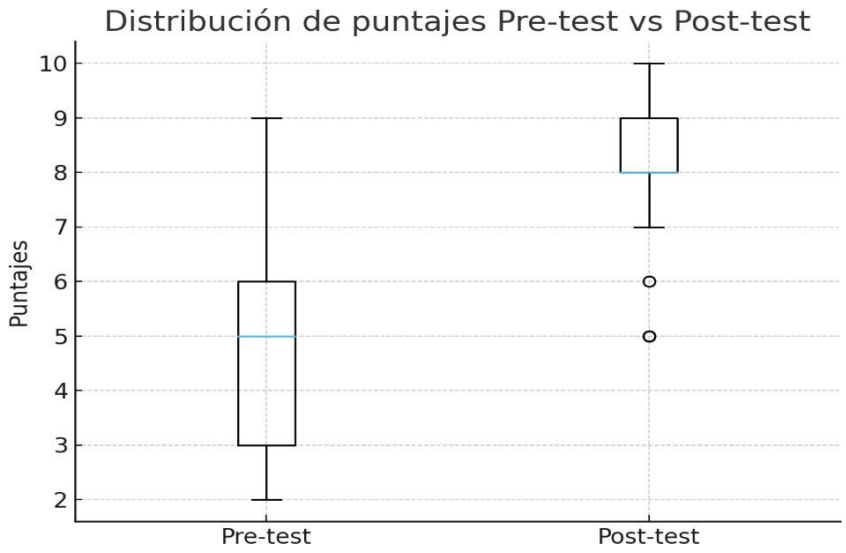
Comparison of pre-test and post-test means (Pie Chart)


Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Means
38%
62%
Pre-test
Post-test

The pie chart shows the proportion of average scores obtained before and after the intervention. The pre-test represents 38% of the total, reflecting the initial performance, while the post-test accounts for 62%, indicating a substantial improvement. This distribution confirms that the majority of the group's performance corresponds to the post-test, demonstrating that the intervention had a positive and consistent impact on all students.

Figure 2

Distribution of pre-test and post-test scores



Pre-test:	Minimum	=	2,	Maximum	=	9,	Median	=	5
Post-test:	Minimum	=	5,	Maximum	=	10,	Median	=	8

Figure 2 illustrates that the distribution of scores shifted upwards in the post-test. The interquartile range is concentrated in higher levels, and the minimum score increased, which means that even the weakest students improved their performanc

5. DISCUSIÓN

The evidence reveals a coherent pattern aligned with the study objectives: learners consolidated sound–symbol correspondences and produced clearer speech following the intervention. The magnitude of the pre–post difference and the reduction in dispersion suggest that pronunciation gains were both meaningful and more evenly distributed across the class—an indicator of pedagogical equity.

These outcomes are congruent with literature that documents benefits of alternative phonetic supports in L2 instruction. Prior studies report improvements in intelligibility when learners are provided with simplified or alternative phonetic cues (Demirezen, 2020; Chaves Fernández et al., 2024). They also align with pronunciation frameworks that integrate form with communicative use (Mora, 2023) and with perspectives from World Englishes and ELF that prioritize intelligibility over native-like targets (Boonsamritphol & Rungrojsuwan, 2021).

From a learning-theory angle, immediate, individualized feedback functions as a salient cue that strengthens accurate production routines; meta-analytic evidence shows that ASR-based pronunciation training with explicit corrective feedback produces significant gains (Ngo, Chen, & Lai, 2024). In communicative lessons, such cues can be embedded without undermining authentic interaction, thereby supporting accuracy while maintaining focus on meaning.

Limitations temper the scope of inference: the convenience sample, single-group design, and correlational analysis restrict generalizability and do not warrant causal claims (Andrade, 2021; Devi et al., 2023). Moreover, fluency was operationalized through controlled oral reading rather than spontaneous speech, and no delayed post-test was administered to examine durability of gains.

Looking ahead, research could incorporate randomized or quasi-experimental comparisons across grade levels, track retention longitudinally, and triangulate segmental accuracy with suprasegmentally measures and listener judgments of intelligibility. Teacher training studies would also help determine how to scale and adapt the strategy for diverse classrooms.

6. CONCLUSIÓN

Focusing on the study goal of improving pronunciation accuracy—and addressing the question of how much Spanish-based respelling improves the accuracy of English pronunciation in primary students—the results show clear progress. The mean score rose from 5.00 to 8.00 and the spread of scores became smaller; even the weakest students at the start reached higher clarity of speech ($t(36) = 13.09$, $p < .001$). Taken together, these data suggest that respelling helps students connect sounds and letters more reliably, reduces common errors, and supports clearer, more controlled speaking in class. This finding agrees with approaches that place intelligibility at the center of pronunciation teaching.

From a performance point of view—and in response to the question about the relationship between Spanish-based respelling and oral fluency in communicative tasks—the evidence also points to improvement. Fluency indicators from oral reading (words correct per minute, WCPM) increased together with accuracy and became more stable across the group. This pattern suggests that, by lowering the effort needed to match spelling and sound, respelling frees attention for speaking and encourages a smoother, more regular pace and rhythm. As a result, students participate in communicative activities with greater ease, making respelling a practical classroom support for building functional fluency while keeping the focus on meaning

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