Experienced ESL Teachers' Attitudes Towards Using Phonetic Symbols in Teaching English Pronunciation to Adult ESL Students

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Experienced ESL Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Using Phonetic Symbols in Teaching English Pronunciation to Adult ESL Students

Oxana Kodirova

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Experienced ESL Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Using Phonetic Symbols in Teaching English Pronunciation to Adult ESL Students

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Different opinions exist about the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching English pronunciation to second language learners. Some authors and researchers believe phonetic symbols can benefit students in many ways; others consider this tool hardly recommendable. However, little empirical research has been done to find out what ESL teachers think about the use of this linguistic tool. Thus, via an online survey this study sought to identify ESL teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching ESL pronunciation. A total of 120 teachers took the survey and most of them were experienced in teaching pronunciation to adult ESL students. The analyses of qualitative data identified a contradiction between experienced teachers’ opinions and what they practiced in class. On the one side, the teachers had predominantly positive attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols, and about 80% of them agreed that it was a valuable use of class time. Despite this, many teachers (n=40) did not report using phonetic symbols in their teaching. In addition, though the teachers pointed out enabling student independent learning as the main reason to teach phonetic symbols, only three participants reported that they used phonetic symbols for this purpose. The results of the study suggest that ESL teachers’ lack of training in teaching phonetic symbols to ESL students can be one of the main factors causing this contradiction.

Keywords: teaching pronunciation, phonetic alphabet symbols, ESL, adult students
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair Dr. Lynn E. Henrichsen for his continuous support, patience, kindness, and immense expertise. Despite the difficulties of getting into an accident and struggling for his health, he was always extremely helpful and inspiring in all the time of research and writing of this thesis and never let me give up. This work would not have been possible without his guidance and enthusiasm.

Besides my chair, I would like to thank Dr. Troy L. Cox for his invaluable help with designing the survey and analyzing the data. I would never have been able to do it without his knowledge and teaching talent. He would always find time to help me with the research despite having an extremely busy schedule. Also, he stepped up to perform the duties of a chair committee when Dr. Henrichsen temporarily could not do it.

My sincere gratitude also goes to Dr. Mark W. Tanner for his very insightful comments and constructive criticism that helped me to make my thesis much better. I also thank him for being ready to be a second rater for this study.

Also, I thank one of MA TESOL students, Sydney Sohler, who agreed to be the second rater and helped me to make my qualitative data analysis more reliable.

Finally, my deep gratitude goes to the ECL teachers who took part in pilot interviews and to all ESL teachers who took the survey and shared their thoughts and opinions.
PREFACE

In accordance with TESOL MA program guidelines, this thesis was prepared as a manuscript to be submitted to the Journal of Second Language Pronunciation. This journal was selected for its aims and scope, to which the discussion and findings of this thesis are relevant. The Journal of Second Language Pronunciation is a scholarly journal devoted to research into the acquisition, perception, production, teaching, assessment, and description of prosodic and segmental pronunciation of second languages in all contexts of learning. This thesis has relevant information in these fields and can inform stakeholders including language learners, educators, policymakers and others.

Requirements for submission to the Journal of Second Language Pronunciation include a word count of approximately 8,500 words (excluding references and appendices). Submissions should be prepared according to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition. The manuscript should be in electronic form in Word only, double-spaced with 3 cm/1 inch margins accompanied with 100-150-word abstract. In order to facilitate the double-blind peer review process of reviewing submissions, all identifying information should be removed.

Alternatively, this thesis could be an apt candidate for submission to English Language Teacher Education and Development (ELTED) Journal. This journal is focused on theoretical and applied issues pertaining to English language teacher education and development. This thesis offers insight to contribute to discussions about English language teacher development. The journal allows the length of submissions between 2,000 and 5,000 words following the formatting of articles in the most recent issue of the journal (except for use of columns).
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................................................. vi  
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................................... vii  

1 Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 1  

2 Literature Review ............................................................................................................................................... 2  
  2.1 Reasons to use phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL/EFL classes .............................................................. 2  
    2.1.1 Phonetic symbols help overcome the lack of sound-spelling correspondence .......................... 2  
    2.1.2 Phonetic alphabet symbols provide visual representation of the sounds ................................ 4  
    2.1.3 Phonetic alphabet symbols increase students’ awareness of English phonemes .................. 6  
    2.1.4 Phonetic alphabet symbols enable independent learning ...................................................... 7  
  2.2 Reasons not to use phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL/EFL classes ...................................................... 13  
    2.2.1 Different inventories of symbols ................................................................................................. 13  
    2.2.2 Insufficient teacher training ......................................................................................................... 18  
    2.2.3 Phonetic alphabet symbols can be overwhelming ................................................................. 21  
    2.2.4 Phonetic symbols can be time consuming ............................................................................ 21  
    2.2.5 There are other ways to teach pronunciation ........................................................................ 22  
  2.3 What do teachers think? ............................................................................................................................. 22  

3 Method ............................................................................................................................................................... 26  
  3.1 Participants ................................................................................................................................................... 26  
  3.2 Data elicitation .......................................................................................................................................... 30  
  3.3 Analysis ...................................................................................................................................................... 31  

4 Results ................................................................................................................................................................. 31  
  4.1 Research question 1 ................................................................................................................................... 31  
  4.2 Research Question 2 .................................................................................................................................. 35  
  4.3 Research question 3 ................................................................................................................................... 36  
  4.4 Research question 4 ................................................................................................................................... 40  
    4.4.1 ESL teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic alphabet symbols .................................. 40  
    4.4.2 Why teachers did not use phonetic symbols .......................................................................... 42  
    4.4.3 Advantages of the use of phonetic alphabet symbols according to ESL teachers.................. 44  
    4.4.4 Disadvantages of the use of phonetic symbols according to ESL teachers ......................... 49  
  4.5 Summary of Findings .................................................................................................................................. 54  

5 Discussion ......................................................................................................................................................... 55  

6 Pedagogical implications .................................................................................................................................. 60  

7 Limitations and future research .......................................................................................................................... 64  

8 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................ 65  

References ............................................................................................................................................................. 66  

Appendix ............................................................................................................................................................... 72
LIST OF TABLES
Table 1: Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers with Different Length of Teaching Experience .34
Table 2: Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers With and Without Pronunciation Teaching
                                              Experience ........................................................................................................................ 36
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Transcription of the Word Water in Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries ................. 8
Figure 2: The Transcription of the Word Water in the Cambridge Dictionary ........................... 8
Figure 3: The Transcription of the Word Water in Longman Dictionary ............................... 9
Figure 4: Examples of Transcribed Words from “American English File” by Latham-Koenig, C., Oxenden, C., and Seligson, P. (2013, p. 148) ......................................................... 9
Figure 5: Examples of Transcribed Words from “Keynote Intermediate Student’s Book” by Dummett, P., Stephenson, H., and Lansford, L. (2017, p. 10) ....................................... 10
Figure 6: The Transcription of the Word Water in Google Dictionary .................................... 10
Figure 7: The Transcription of the Word Water in Google Translate ........................................ 11
Figure 8: Example of Phonetic Symbols Used in One of the YouTube Pronunciation Video Instruction .................................................................................................................... 11
Figure 9: The Word Bed Transcribed in the Macmillan Dictionary ........................................... 15
Figure 10: The Word Bed Transcribed at Dictionary.com .......................................................... 15
Figure 11: The Sources of the Participants’ Training in Phonetics and Phonology ................. 27
Figure 12: Participants’ Teaching Experience (in Years) ............................................................ 29
Figure 13: The Value of Phonetic Symbol Instruction According to ESL Teachers ............... 33
Figure 14: Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers with Different Lengths of Teaching Experience ................................................................................................................................. 34
Figure 15: Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers With and Without Pronunciation Teaching Experience ..................................................................................................................... 36
Figure 16: Teachers’ Opinion About the Value of Students’ Ability to Decipher Phonetic Symbols ................................................................................................................................. 42
Experienced ESL Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Using Phonetic Symbols in Teaching English Pronunciation to Adult ESL Students

Introduction

The standard orthography of many languages does not always represent the pronunciation of words accurately. This is due to the fact that pronunciation changes over time in all languages, while orthography often tends to preserve the representation of older oral forms and as a result, fails to reflect these changes (Lerer, 2013; “Phonetic transcription,” 2020, para. 1). The purpose of phonetic alphabets is to overcome this discrepancy between oral and written forms suggesting a consistent one-to-one relationship between a symbol and the speech sound it represents (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992 p. 7; “Phonetic transcription,” 2020, para. 2). One of the oldest and the most widely known phonetic alphabets is The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It is a universally agreed upon system of symbols that is used to visually and accurately represent the speech sounds of any language (International Phonetic Association [IPA], 1999, p. 3).

Since English orthography is not phonemic and it is hard to predict the pronunciation of English words from the way they are spelled, phonetic alphabets have been commonly used in teaching English pronunciation since the end of the 19th century (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 3; Reed & Levis, 2015, p. 41). However, the importance of teaching ESL/EFL pronunciation was deemphasized in the second half of the 20th century, and though the interest towards it has been revived recently, pronunciation is still considered an underdeveloped area in teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) (Beghoul, 2017, p. 68; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p. 983; Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 293; Reed & Levis, 2015, p. xiii). Consequently, it is unclear to what extent phonetic symbols are still part of language instruction nowadays. On the one side, most dictionaries, many computer-assisted language learning sources, applications, textbooks, manuals, and even YouTube videos on pronunciation employ phonetic symbols, expecting users to know what the symbols stand for (see Figures 1-8). However, in language classroom teaching phonetic symbols is not usually considered as indispensable and often depends on a teacher’s decision (Brown, 1991, p. 89; Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 293; Yoshida, 2013, p. 24).
Therefore, the main objective of this study was to find out if (a) ESL teachers make phonetic symbols part of their pronunciation instruction, and (b) what they think of the effectiveness of this tool. To answer these questions, first, we review the existing literature on the pros and cons of the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching English pronunciation. Next we describe a survey (and its results) conducted among ESL teachers experienced in teaching pronunciation to investigate their attitudes towards using phonetic symbols in ESL classrooms and the reasons behind these attitudes.

The results of this investigation will contribute to better understanding of the following:

- Reasons to use and teach phonetic symbols to language learners;
- The challenges teachers face using phonetic symbols as part of their pronunciation instruction;
- Teaching pronunciation successfully using phonetic symbols.

**Literature Review**

The use of phonetic alphabet symbols in the field of ESL/EFL is a contentious issue. There are those who believe phonetic symbols can be a beneficial tool in teaching pronunciation and those who disagree with that opinion (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 293). However, being objective, most authors and researchers consider both advantages and disadvantages of using phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation.

**Reasons to use phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL/EFL classes**

The next section will discuss why teachers may choose to use phonetic symbols technique in teaching ESL/EFL pronunciation.

**Phonetic symbols help overcome the lack of sound-spelling correspondence in English.**

Due to the historical circumstances in which English developed, the relationship between sounds and their spellings is quite inconsistent. One letter can represent many phonemes, and one phoneme can be represented by many letters and their combinations. For example, the letter $c$ can be
pronounced as the phonemes /k/, /s/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ as in cat, city, cello and ocean respectively, while there are 14 ways the phoneme /ʃ/ can be spelled (as in shoe, sugar, issue, mansion, mission, nation, suspicion, ocean, nauseous, conscious, chaperone, schist, fuchsia, and pshaw) (Barrows, 1938, p. 1-2; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 54). In addition, there are many silent letters like b in debt, w in answer or gh in brought. Consequently, English spelling often confuses English learners when they try to pronounce English words. Unlike native speakers who learned words “by ear” and usually do not have to rely on spelling to pronounce words correctly, adult English learners typically pronounce words based on their visual representations, which do not always coincide with their aural forms (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 97). This sound-spelling inconsistency often misleads adult students and makes the process of learning English longer (Beghoul, 2017, p. 66; Wells, 1996, p. 239 -242). For example, one of the typical mistakes that students make is pronouncing the letter e in the past tense ending -ed of regular verbs. Though the phonological rule in this case is simple, sometimes teachers have to spend a lot of time helping their students not to be fooled by the presence of the letter e that is actually silent in most of the cases. Often even knowing the rule, language learners still rely on what they see instead of what they know. Another example can be a letter that can stand for several sounds but one of the sounds is typically associated more with the given letter than the others. For example, letter s can be pronounced as /s/ or /z/ like in season. However, the sound /z/ is typically associated with the letter z instead of the letter s. Consequently, when students see the letter s they expect it to stand for /s/ not /z/ and pronounce season like /ˈsiːʃ(ə)n/ instead of /ˈsiːz(ə)n/.

Some authors and researchers believe that using phonetic symbols helps solve the problem of sound-spelling inconsistency since it offers a one-to-one relationship between each symbol and its corresponding sound. Supporting this idea, Mompean and Lintunen (2015) suggest, that “phonetic notation can function as a convenient code with which teachers and learners can discuss issues in pronunciation simply and unambiguously” (p. 295). For instance, transcribed into IPA, the stressed vowel sound in the words cup, mother, does, touch, and blood is represented by the same symbol /ʌ/ in all of these cases despite the many differences in spelling. On the other hand, the combination of th in the words think and they is shown by two different IPA symbols /θ/ and /ð/ correspondingly,
because these letters stand for two distinct sounds. Thus, we see that in comparison with the Roman alphabet, phonetic notation serves as a much more precise and exact representation of English sounds and can be used as an effective tool to deal with situations when irregular English spellings interfere with English learners’ sound perception of a word (Atkielski, 2019, p. 1; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. 6-7; Heselwood, 2013, p. 253-255; Wells, 1996; Yoshida, 2013, p. 23).

**Phonetic alphabet symbols provide visual representation of the sounds.**

If English spelling seems so misleading in acquiring the correct pronunciation of English words, then is it possible to learn their aural form just by listening to a teacher or native speakers? Taking into consideration that modern technologies have made it possible to listen to any word pronounced by native speakers, even in different accents, this procedure sounds like a simple way out. Thus, some might consider phonetic transcriptions of English words provided by online dictionaries as something outdated and not useful anymore (Google Translate Help, 2020). However, if we admit that hearing is enough, it means that living among native speakers and interacting with them on a regular basis would be sufficient for adult ESL students to constantly improve their pronunciation. Unfortunately, in many cases that does not happen.

As Wells (1996) puts forward, “…mere exposure to authentic language material, while it will certainly improve a learner’s comprehension ability, is not sufficient to ensure a good productive command of the language or a good pronunciation” (p. 239). In the case of little children who are endowed with the ability to acquire native-like pronunciation without being explicitly instructed or given any visual support, hearing and imitating is usually enough. However, when the critical (sensitive) period is over, the human brain starts losing the plasticity necessary for acquiring foreign sounds (Flege, 1995; Kelly, 2020). By this time phonetic prototypes, or mental representations of L1 phonemes, are established and “after that point, new phonetic contrasts will be processed through such an L1 filter, and hence it is more difficult, although not biologically impossible, to detect and produce L2 categories that are not salient” (Ortega, 2009, p.23). This means that, the older we get, and the more settled we are in our L1 representations, the harder it is for us to acquire foreign sounds.
Consequently, “when features in the L1 and L2 are quite similar, but not exactly the same, learners can easily misinterpret them as the same sound” (Grant, 2014, p. 127). For example, in Japanese, there is no contrast between the phonemes /l/ and /r/. That is why it is extremely hard for Japanese learners to master the corresponding sounds in English. Spanish speakers face a similar difficulty when they encounter the contrast between the phonemes /v/ and /b/, because in Spanish they are allophones and perceived as the same sound. As a result, just hearing words will not help such learners to differentiate the phonemes. They can listen to native speakers saying the words containing the target sounds many times and still fail to hear the difference (Grant, 2014, p. 127; Heselwood, 2013, p. 254). As Yoshida (2013) explains, “As adults, we don’t “hear” all the speech sounds that come into our ears— only the ones that we’re used to” (p. 14).

Though there are no simple remedies to solve the problem of mispronunciation by L2 learners, phonetic notation can serve as an effective tool to represent the correct speech sounds visually “transforming them into a palpable concept” (Pištora, 2017, p. 34; Beghoul, 2017, p. 74). In other words, the visual display of sounds “enables the students to comprehend the elements of pronunciation visually as well as aurally” (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 54). It increases the students’ ability to differentiate between the sounds because they can see what they cannot hear. In addition, visualization facilitates noticing and self-correction. As Atkielski (2019) states, “a student can often better understand his errors in pronunciation if he sees them spelled out in static, visual form” (p. 1).

The benefits of visualization provided by phonetic symbols can go beyond teaching the segmental sounds in individual words. Connected speech features usually occur in aural form but not in the standard orthography, which makes it harder for adult English learners to perceive them. For example, in connected speech native speakers sometimes reduce the /h/ sound if it is in a medial position between two words. Instead of saying “Call him,” they tend to say “Call ‘im.” However, the letter h is typically not omitted in the standard orthography. Thus, “phonetic transcription is useful for showing the significant differences between the pronunciation of isolated words in a dictionary and the actual pronunciation of those same words when they are grouped together in connected speech” (Atkielski, 2019, p. 1).
Phonetic alphabet symbols increase students’ awareness of English phonemes.

Unlike little children who usually acquire a second language entirely naturally, adults often tend to need “analysis and analogy” in learning an L2 (Ortega, 2009, p. 158). First, this “cognitive and linguistic endowment to learn entirely implicitly” is usually lost with age, and adults have to use some other paths to learn a new language (Ortega, 2009, p.158; Kelly, 2020). Second, being cognitively mature and having developed the necessary metalinguistic skills, adults can understand and consequently, may ask for explicit instruction in class. The reason for such requests is not only adults’ wish to have logical explanations; explicit instruction helps to raise a learner’s awareness. “If instruction targets explicit processes, . . . it can help summon conscious attention [emphasis added] in ways needed to optimize the learning of particularly challenging generalizations” (Ortega, 2009, p. 137).

Very often explicit instruction is focused on grammar. However, this implicit vs explicit learning discussion also applies to teaching pronunciation. Some teachers expect their adult learners to develop accurate L2 pronunciation without any explanations, relying entirely on imitation. Though some pronunciation features are easy to acquire this way, there are also some aspects that are very hard for L2 learners to grasp unless “they are made aware of them and consciously pay attention to them” (Pištora, 2017, p. 34). Phonetic alphabet symbols can be particularly helpful in making pronunciation teaching more explicit. Arleo (1993) regards phonetic symbols as a “rational framework for pronunciation,” functioning similarly to grammatical explanations that “can save time for learners by allowing them to spot regular patterns in the target language” (p. 44).

For example, English learners frequently fail to notice such things as connected speech processes, accent differences, or the difference between some minimal pairs sounds like /e/ and /æ/ or /ɪ/ and /iː/. These pronunciation features can be neglected, not necessarily due to their difficulty but because of students’ being unaware of them. Sometimes the only thing that needs to be done for improvements to take place is to let students know that they have a certain problem. Thus, phonetic
Phonetic alphabet symbols enable independent learning.

Enabling students to learn autonomously is one of the essential parts of effective second language teaching. Teachers cannot be around to help students all the time. As Yoshida (2013) notes, “someday [students] will be facing pronunciation puzzles on their own. If we can help them build up their own skills in listening and imitating, it will be a big help to them in their future learning” (p. 16). This is another situation when phonetic symbols can be valuable.

Most dictionaries and computer assisted language learning sources employ phonetic transcriptions using one of the existing phonetic alphabets, even when there is an opportunity to hear a word’s pronunciation. Such well-known dictionaries as Oxford, Cambridge, and Longman use the IPA (see Figures 1-3). Also, the IPA appears in many textbooks and manuals produced by such respected publishers as Oxford University Press, National Geographic, etc. (see Figures 4-5). Google Translator and Google Dictionary, which are becoming popular with ESL/EFL learners nowadays, also provide their users with phonetic transcriptions of isolated words using a set of symbols different from the IPA (see Figures 6-7). Another source of instruction that has become favored by both English teachers and learners all over the world is YouTube. This online video-sharing platform contains numerous videos about English pronunciation and most of them employ phonetic symbols. This pattern shows that the authors expect their viewers to associate target sounds with the corresponding symbols (see Figure 8).
Figure 1

*The Transcription of the Word Water in Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*

Note: Retrieved from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/water_1?q=water

Figure 2

*The Transcription of the Word Water in the Cambridge Dictionary*

Note: Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/water
Figure 3

The Transcription of the Word Water in Longman Dictionary

Note: Retrieved from https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/water

Figure 4

Figure 5


Note: Retrieved from https://bre.eltkeynote.com/sample-units/intermediate

Figure 6

The Transcription of the Word Water in Google Dictionary

Note: Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=google+dictionary&oq=Google+dictionary&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j0l3j69i60l2j69i65j69i60.3566j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#dobs=water
**Figure 7**
*The Transcription of the Word Water in Google Translate*

![Google Translate](https://translate.google.com/#view=home&op=translate&sl=auto&tl=en&text=water)

*Note:* Retrieved from https://translate.google.com/#view=home&op=translate&sl=auto&tl=en&text=water

**Figure 8**
*Example of Phonetic Symbols Used in One of the YouTube Pronunciation Video Instruction*

![Phonetic Symbols](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlKNo1TGALA)

*Note:* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlKNo1TGALA
It's obvious that the goal of publishers, authors, and program developers is to ensure that learners have an additional tool they can use, not only under teacher’s supervision but also outside the classroom while working on their pronunciation. The usefulness of phonetic alphabets as a means of autonomously achieving phonetic competence is recognized by many authors. Thus, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) state that students who are able to decipher phonetically transcribed words in their dictionaries “will be better equipped to check pronunciation autonomously” (p.54). Pištora (2017) elaborates on the idea further:

As most language dictionaries and learning materials do include transcription, learners cannot use their full potential without the passive knowledge of transcription and will always have to rely on the presence of a teacher and their memory. The auditory memory often being inaccurate, they will rely often too heavily on the spelling and will apply their L1 knowledge to the L2 phonology, which will inevitably lead to perceptual assimilation and distorted pronunciation. (p. 34)

The benefits of autonomous learning provided by the knowledge of phonetic notation however are not limited by learners’ ability to determine the pronunciation of isolated words in a dictionary or understanding the video instruction on YouTube without a teacher’s assistance. Mompean and Lintunen (2015) mention one more independent learning skill that might be cultivated by exploiting phonetic transcription. It is “the ability to refer, in handwriting or typescript, to pronunciation units and features” (p. 297). To illustrate the principle, the authors give the example of Finnish, French and Spanish learners of English who usually “transcribe English words such as ‘fill’ and ‘feel’ both with the same letter, that is <i> (i.e. ‘fil’), given that these languages do not have a qualitative distinction between front vowels such as the one found in English” (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 297). Consequently, resorting to their L1 to mark pronunciation features of L2 words, the learners might fail to differentiate between English /ɪ/ and /iː/. The L1 sound system is never identical to the one in the L2 and cannot effectively reflect English phonemes. Therefore, phonetic
symbols, which are more precise in representing English sounds, can serve as a better means to achieve the goal of correct English pronunciation.

**Reasons not to use phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL/EFL classes**

In contrast with the previous section, this section will describe why teachers may avoid using phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching ESL/EFL pronunciation.

**Different inventories of symbols.**

Usually the phrase “phonetic alphabet” is associated with the IPA, which is the most widely known set of symbols. However, other phonetic alphabets have been developed over the years. For example, Alexander Melville Bell’s Visible Speech Alphabet (IPA, 1999, p. 197) or the North American Phonetic Alphabet (NAPA) also known as Americanist phonetic notation (used and modified by Bloch and Trager, Kurath, Chomsky and Halle, and others) (“Americanist phonetic notation”, 2020; “Category: Phonetic alphabets,” 2013). Thus, we see that there is no agreement among different sources in terms of how and what kind of phonetic alphabet to use.

There is no connection between a particular alphabet and a particular variety of English. Different alphabets may represent the same language variety, and the same alphabet may be used to represent different accents. For example, the Cambridge Online Dictionary and Oxford Learners’ Dictionaries employ the IPA to represent both, British and American accents (See Figures 1-2). However, some dictionaries, such as Google Dictionary, prefer a different set of symbols (See Figure 6). A similar situation can be seen with reference to materials for teachers. As Arleo (1993) notes, “the symbols used by American linguists differ from those of the International Phonetic Association” (p. 44). For instance, the system of symbols employed by Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich in their book *Teaching American English Pronunciation* (1992, p. 7) differs from the system one can find in *English Phonetics and Phonology* written by British phonetician Peter Roach (1991, p. vi).
In order to avoid confusing their readers, some authors find it necessary to provide a comparison chart, which includes the set of phonetic symbols used in their book alongside other existing phonetic transcription systems. For example, in their book *Teaching Pronunciation: A Course Book and a Reference Guide*, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin have a comparison chart with which one can trace the differences between seven transcription systems used for General American English (2010, p. 459). Joanne Kenworthy used the set of symbols employed by the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* as a reference in her book *Teaching English Pronunciation*. Assuming her readers are familiar with the Longman system, she compares the phonetic alphabet used in her book with the Longman one, although both sets describe British English. (Kenworthy, 1987, p. x).

Furthermore, since the IPA was first introduced, several different versions of the IPA symbols used to represent English sounds have been developed (Yoshida, 2013, p. 23). Consequently, many authors claiming to use the IPA, actually employ to different IPA symbols. For example, the *Macmillian Dictionary* and *Dictionary.com* transcribe the vowel in *bed* differently, as /e/ and /ɛ/ respectively. (See Figures 9-10).
Figure 9

The Word Bed Transcribed in the Macmillan Dictionary

Note: Retrieved from https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/bed_1

Figure 10

The Word Bed Transcribed at Dictionary.com

Note: Retrieved from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bed?s=t
One of the reasons for such a variety of symbol sets is that the goal of the IPA, as the International Phonetic Association claims, is not to provide “a single ‘correct’ transcription, but rather the resources to express any analysis so that it is widely understood” (IPA, 1999, p. 30). This means that the IPA is a set of guidelines rather than a set of rigid rules. Depending on the purpose and context of an individual, it can be used in different ways. Some authors may feel it necessary to adapt a transcription system used for a particular language in order to meet the needs of learners and teachers better (Yoshida, 2013, p. 23; Wells, 2001, para. 1). Therefore, “there can be many systems of phonetic transcription for the same variety of a language, all of which conform fully to the principles of the IPA” (IPA, 1999, p. 30).

Furthermore, academic freedom allows writers to choose whatever phonetic notation system they wish. As Wells (2001) puts it, “No one can impose a given transcription scheme on an author, although most authors have the common sense to adopt a widely-used scheme rather than invent one of their own” (para. 1). As a result, “many textbooks and dictionaries use variations of the IPA that are still referred as ‘IPA’. Although “most of them are not exactly like “real” IPA” (Yoshida, 2013, p. 23).

Let us now come back to the issue with the vowel in the word bed in order to illustrate the principles mentioned above. To depict the phoneme, some dictionaries employ the symbol /e/, others use /ɛ/ instead. The issue with this English sound is that it lies somewhere between the phonemes that these two IPA symbols denote. The allophones of the English vowel can be closer either to /e/ or /ɛ/ depending on the speaker’s native region. Hence, the choice here is usually dictated by authors’ preferences and/or needs. (IPA, 1999, p. 30; Wells, 2001, para. 7)

Another example may be the contrasting vowels in the words cod–cord and dill–deal in Received Pronunciation. They are usually depicted in three distinct ways in different sources claiming to use the IPA. The case is that some dictionaries show only the quantitative distinction between the phonemes using the same symbols for both with and without a colon (length mark). Thus, the vowels in cod–cord and dill–deal are transcribed as /ɔː/ - /ɔːə/ and /iː/ - /iː/ respectively. Other sources emphasize the qualitative difference only and resort to different symbols. As a result, /ɔː/ shows the
vowel sound in *cod*, /ɔ/ in *cord*, /ɪ/ in *dill* and /i:/ in *deal*. However, there are also those phoneticians who consider it important to underline both quantitative and qualitative differences of the contrasting sounds. They prefer the symbols that both look different from each other and are provided with a length mark for the long phonemes. Consequently, the vowel in *cod* is depicted by /ɔ/, in *cord* by /ɔː/, in *dill* by /ɪ/, and in *deal* by /iː/. However, none of these three ways contradict the principles of the IPA (IPA, 1999, p. 30; Wells, 2001, para. 5).

Other differences may be caused by alternative phonemic analyses of the same sounds. As an example, phoneticians still do not agree if long vowels and diphthongs should be analyzed as unitary phonemes or as combinations of a short vowel phoneme and an approximant. Thus, depending on the approach a writer adheres to, such words as *heed* and *how* can be transcribed in different ways, either as /hiːd/ and /hau/ or as /hijd/ and /haw/ (IPA, 1999, p. 30). In addition, which symbol is better to use to represent the palatal approximant (the one that occurs at the beginning of *yes*) is also a disputed question. Among the sources supporting the view of long vowels being a combination of a short vowel and an approximant, there are those who prefer to transcribe the vowel in the word *heed* as /iː/ instead of /ij/ (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 460). This choice is explained by the fact that “the use of /y/ for the palatal approximant mirrors the English spelling, which is an advantage for people who are primarily interested in representing the sounds of English and are not too concerned with the pronunciation of other languages” (Read & Levis, 2015, p. 75 – 76).

In addition to the IPA symbols being used in different ways by different sources, sometimes the set for a particular language might consist of the IPA symbols only to a certain extent. The rest of it might contain the symbols that do not belong to the IPA. For instance, some writers, mostly American, “use the ‘hacek’ symbols /š, ž, č, ř/ instead of the respective IPA symbols /ʃ, z, tʃ, dʒ/” (Read & Levis, 2015, p. 75).

Also, English, like any living language, is constantly changing, and some authors see it necessary to adjust the phonetic set of symbols in accordance with the transformations that the language is undergoing. However, this might be an individual decision of a writer motivated by their goals and circumstances. Others may choose to stay conservative and avoid introducing any revisions.
for the sake of uniformity. For one thing, the vowel sound /æ/ as in bat has changed its quality in Received Pronunciation and become more open since the 1930’s. Hence, some modern authors refused to use the traditional /æ/ symbol and started employing the /a/ symbol to refer to the sound. Others, however, still stick with the familiar /æ/ symbol (Wells, 2001).

Furthermore, the language is not the only factor that is constantly changing. Phonetics, as a science, develops over time as well. As IPA (1993) underlines, “new facts emerge, new theories are created, and new solutions to old problems are invented. . . . So it is natural that from time to time the Alphabet should be modified to accommodate innovations” (p. 3).

As a result, the practice of resorting to different sets of symbols by different authors and phoneticians usually has justifiable reasons. However, language learners and teachers often are unaware of those reasons and get confused when they see that the same English words are transcribed differently in different sources (Roach, 1991, p. 42). That is one of the reasons why language teachers might choose to avoid using phonetic alphabets in teaching English pronunciation.

**Insufficient teacher training.**

As has been mentioned above, using phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation can be very beneficial. However, it can turn into a useless or even negative experience if a teacher lacks the necessary skills and knowledge of how to use and teach phonetic alphabet symbols to students (Pištora, 2017 p. 35). As Mompean (2005) states, “good teaching practices may increase learners’ motivation to use phonetic symbols. In contrast, a negative learning experience may cause phonetic notation to be perceived as something unattractive and even irrelevant to learning the foreign language” (p. 1). Therefore, teachers’ not being properly trained in phonetics is usually considered one of the drawbacks of using phonetic alphabets in English classes (Pištora, 2017 p. 35).

Unfortunately, the teaching of pronunciation has been a neglected area in ESL/EFL teacher preparation for quite a long time (Alghazo, 2015, p. 63; Beghoul, 2017, p. 68; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 293; Morley, 1991). After the failure of the audio-lingual
approach to achieve native-like pronunciation among English learners in the 1950s and 1960s, teaching pronunciation was minimized in favor of more achievable objectives, such as grammar and vocabulary. The subsequent development of the communicative approach, which is focused on functional and communicative goals, did not help to improve the situation. Though being intelligible is important for a communication to take place (Arleo, 1993, p. 43; Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 294; Yoshida, 2013, p. 5), the proponents of the approach haven’t developed any agreed-upon strategies for teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 5-9). As Breitkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) explain, “this was due both to an increased emphasis on input-based instruction and to the perception that pronunciation issues were more related to accuracy than to communication” (p. 52).

One consequence of pronunciation marginalization is the fact that teacher training programs often lack any modules relating to phonetics and phonology (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 294). For example, the findings of the survey conducted by Henderson et al. (2012) among European EFL teachers suggest that “teacher training in relation to the teaching of English pronunciation is woefully inadequate, according to the majority of participants” (p. 23). Even in the best of these situations, respondents had been instructed how to improve their own pronunciation, but not how to teach it to students (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Henderson et al., 2012, p. 13).

As a large number of studies shows, at least until recently, ESL teacher-training programs have had the same tendency as EFL ones to ignore pronunciation. For instance, Breitkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) surveyed several ESL programs in Canada (n=67) and found out that only 30% of the program instructors had training in the area of teaching pronunciation (p. 56). A follow-up study (n=159) conducted by Foote, Holtby, and Derwing (2011) demonstrated that though training opportunities had somewhat been raised, “the demand for increased support has not faded” and 75% of ESL teachers, who took part in the study, would like more pronunciation training (p. 16).

Because of insufficient teacher training, many language teachers either feel a lack of confidence while teaching pronunciation and tend to avoid it or do not consider it important at all (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2000, p. 983). A number of surveys and observations confirm that
pronunciation is paid the least attention and time in English classrooms compared to other language-learning areas. One of these studies, conducted in Canada, was based on video-recordings of three experienced teachers teaching ESL classes. This study showed that only 10% of all the teaching time was devoted to pronunciation (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 180).

Another recent research study was done by Cox, Henrichsen, Tanner, and McMurry (2019) at Brigham Young University’s English Language Center in Provo, UT, USA. In this study, three upper-level advanced listening and speaking and one beginning listening and speaking ESL classes were each observed for a week (260 minutes for each class). Considering the teachers had been informed of the purpose of the observation, one might have expected a greater amount and broader range of pronunciation instruction. However, only suprasegmentals turned out to be the focus of the teachers’ attention. Segmental sounds were addressed only if a student asked a question. None of the teachers provided any correction of inaccurate pronunciation. The next wave of observations in this study included one listening and speaking class, two linguistic accuracy (grammar) classes, and one writing and grammar class at various levels. Unlike the first wave of observations, these observations were unannounced (the teachers were not aware of the purpose of the observation) and lasted one day only (65 minutes for each class). The results showed that out of 260 minutes of instruction in all four classes only 10 minutes were devoted to segmental sounds, and none to suprasegmentals. Also, only seven pronunciation-related recasts took place. There was no other pronunciation instruction. Furthermore, interviews with the teachers demonstrated that all of them “felt inadequate teaching pronunciation due to lack of sufficient training in this area” (Cox, et al., 2019, p. 6).

Hartshorn, Hart, and McMurry (2019) conducted a survey-based study that illustrates the tendency of ESL educators to marginalize pronunciation. The goal of the research was to compare language skill priorities among 47 ESL teachers and 215 ESL students in an intensive English program in the United States. The results showed that out of seven language skill areas (listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, speaking, grammar, pronunciation) pronunciation was perceived as the least important by ESL professionals. Conversely, “ESL students tend to be much more concerned about pronunciation” (Hartshorn, Hart, & McMurry, 2019, p. 10).
Therefore, if English teachers do not favor and/or do not feel confident teaching pronunciation in general, then why would they teach phonetic alphabet symbols in particular? Success using phonetic symbols in class is impossible without understanding phonetic theory and experience both in using and teaching them. The fact that many teachers simply do not have phonetic training or experience using phonetic symbols explains why teachers would avoid using this tool in their classes despite all its advantages (Atkielski, 2019, p. 8; Henderson et al., 2015, p. 272; Heselwood, 2013, p. 253).

**Phonetic alphabet symbols can be overwhelming.**

Another objection against using phonetic transcription in teaching English pronunciation is the fact that students have to master additional symbols that are not part of the traditional English (Roman) alphabet. It may be overwhelming especially for those whose native language is not based on the Latin alphabet (Beghoul, 2017, p. 73; Pištora, 2017, p. 34). Minimizing the number of new symbols is one of the reasons why “a lot of materials opt for symbols of conventional orthography where possible, that are more familiar to the students, rather than specialized IPA symbols (e. g. “a” for /ʌ/, or “z” for /ʒ/)” (Pištora, 2017, p. 34).

**Phonetic symbols can be time consuming.**

Even if students are already familiar with the English alphabet and/or their native language uses the Roman script, learning and mastering phonetic symbols takes time. Often teachers have to focus on a lot of objectives within a very limited amount of class time. Since pronunciation is usually considered to be the least important objective, as was mentioned above, teachers may feel they do not have enough time to teach phonetic symbols to their students (Arleo, 1993, p. 40; Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 294).
There are other ways to teach pronunciation.

Phonetic transcription is a tool that language instructors can employ to teach pronunciation. However, it is not the only way to achieve the goal of improved pronunciation. As Brown states, “It is possible to teach pronunciation without making use of them [phonetic symbols], and it is also possible to teach pronunciation using IPA without succeeding in teaching pronunciation” (Brown, 1991, p. 88). In order to demonstrate the distribution of sounds, teachers may use numbers (Brown, 1991, p. 90), colors (Thompson & Taylor), respelling (Pištora, 2017, p. 31), gestures and pointers (Allegra, 2018, p.3) or a combination of these and other tools depending on the context in which teaching takes place and personal preferences.

What do teachers think?

As shown by the literature review, attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in ESL/EFL teaching are ambivalent. The tool has pros and cons. However, the reasons to use or avoid phonetic symbols presented in the literature review above are based mostly on the article or textbook authors’ experience and analysis rather than any empirical research. They do not take into account teachers’ preferences. So, what do ESL teachers think about phonetic symbols? Do their reasons for using or avoiding this pronunciation tool in class coincide with the reasons described above? Unfortunately, very few studies have investigated these questions, especially in teaching ESL. Most of the surveys dealing with phonetic alphabets, the IPA particularly, among both L2 teachers and learners, have been done in the EFL field.

One of the biggest surveys was conducted by Henderson et al. (2015) among 640 English language teachers from seven European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Macedonia, Poland, Spain and Switzerland) teaching students of various ages. Ninety per cent of the respondents were non-native speakers of English. The goal of the research was to investigate pronunciation teaching broadly, and it did not focus on phonetic alphabets or symbols. However, it produced some useful data related to the use of the IPA by EFL teachers. According to the survey results, the greater part of the respondents (566 out of 640) did use phonetic alphabet symbols in their classes. One would think
that this response indicates positive rather than negative teachers’ attitude towards the tool. However, the researchers did not come to that conclusion stating simply that the use of phonetic symbols was a contentious issue (Henderson et al., 2015, p. 270). This disagreement was due to the fact that the use of phonetic symbols was compared to “ear training” in terms of teachers’ preferences, and the latter was more popular. Additionally, the authors didn’t provide much qualitative data describing the participants’ reasoning to teach or not to teach with the IPA symbols in their classes. Language specific features, the age of learners, a lack of self-confidence with symbols and the need to prioritize due to limited amount of time were the main explanations for the teachers’ decision making in terms of teaching phonetic symbols (Henderson et al., 2015, p. 271). However, the researchers did not explain directly why the majority of the respondents still used phonetic symbols for pronunciation teaching.

A similar survey was conducted by Tergujeff (2012) in Finland with 103 EFL teachers. Fortunately, it provided a more detailed picture of the issue. Like the study by Henderson et al. (2015), it also found that the majority of the participants (n=92) taught their students to recognize either all or at least some of the IPA phonetic symbols. In addition, the qualitative data demonstrated the participants’ positive attitude towards this pronunciation tool as a whole. They considered the IPA to be “essential in language learning” (Tergujeff, 2012, p. 38) and helpful in improving learners’ pronunciation. Besides, they believed that knowledge of phonetic symbols promoted independent learning and helped the learners “to distinguish written and spoken language” (Tergujeff, 2012, p. 38). Also, the respondents explained the necessity to teach phonetic symbols because “EFL textbooks introduce the symbols and provide material for practising the symbols” (Tergujeff, 2012, p. 38). Since that reason is rarely mentioned in the research literature, Tergujeff (2012) provided an additional insight into the matter. Among the comments explaining the reasons why teachers do not use phonetic symbols in EFL teaching were lack of time and the belief that there are more important things to teach. Confusion among learners was also mentioned frequently. However, it was not related to the issue of different inventories of symbols. The respondents believed that phonetic symbols could
possibly interfere with students’ spelling skills (Tergujeff, 2012, p. 39), another insight that is not mentioned in the research literature.

In contrast to the seemingly rosy picture created by the survey results discussed above, the study conducted by Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) in North Cyprus indicated that the use of phonetic alphabet symbols was not always so common in EFL teaching. The goal of their research was to investigate EFL teachers’ (n=103) preferences for different pronunciation-teaching techniques. The results showed that only 2.9% of the teachers chose to use phonetic transcription as a pronunciation technique in their class. Of course, phonetic symbols can be used to teach pronunciation in many different ways, and transcription is just one of them. However, the teachers were provided with only one option in relation to the use of phonetic symbols, and there were no open-ended questions. In addition, the study didn’t include any data explaining the reasons for teachers’ choices.

Other studies, conducted among EFL students, indicate their mostly positive attitudes towards phonetic symbols. For example, out of 67 participants of the survey Arleo (1993) conducted in Saint-Nazaire, France, more than 70% “thought that learning the IPA was "somewhat" or "very useful" in learning a foreign language” (p. 43). The research by Mompean and Lintunen (2015) with 177 advanced EFL university learners from Finland, France and Spain also revealed their predominantly positive rather than negative views on the use of phonetic symbols in pronunciation learning.

Thus, we can see that, though the question needs further research, the use of phonetic symbols in the EFL field tends to be perceived positively both by teachers and learners. However, relatively little is known about whether these attitudes are shared by those who teach or learn ESL. Though several research projects have studied ESL pronunciation teaching (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Burns, 2006; Foote et al., 2011; MacDonald, 2002; Murphy, 2011), very few of them address the use of phonetic symbols.

Burgess and Spencer (1999) surveyed 32 ESL teachers in the UK and found out that most of them did teach a phonemic alphabet to their students to a certain degree (p.197). In contrast, the
survey conducted by Murphy (2011) in Ireland indicated that most of the respondents (n=36) did not consider introducing the IPA chart to be one of the most effective ways to teach English pronunciation (p.13). However, neither of the studies further investigated the participants’ views on the use of phonetic alphabet symbols.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to investigate ESL teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation, and the possible reasons for these attitudes. Often, opinions are shaped by practical experience. Hence, one of the factors that can potentially influence ESL teachers’ positive or negative attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols is the length of their teaching experience. Previous teaching pronunciation experience might be another factor contributing to teachers’ positive or negative attitudes. Another question investigated by this study was if teachers’ beliefs about pros and cons of the use of phonetic symbols in ESL class supported or refuted the reasons enumerated in the literature review. This information helped to elucidate what challenges ESL teachers usually face when they use phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation. The hope is these findings will assist teachers in improving their pronunciation instruction.

The specific research questions were as follows:

1. Does the number of years of teaching experience affect teachers’ attitudes towards using phonetic alphabet symbols in class?
2. Does previous experience teaching pronunciation affect teachers’ attitudes towards using phonetic alphabet symbols in class?
3. How do experienced ESL pronunciation teachers use phonetic alphabet symbols?
4. What are teachers’ opinions about the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation and do their opinions for or against using phonetic symbols match the pros and the cons mentioned in the literature review?
Method

This section will describe the participants, the data elicitation instrument, and the analytical procedures used in this study.

Participants

Overall, 120 ESL teachers participated in this study after being invited to respond to an online survey. However, some of the participants did not complete all of the survey questions. Therefore, in the analysis that is described below, the number of respondents for a given item varies and will be indicated throughout this report where possible.

A total of 117 respondents indicated their birth country, and 80% of them were from English-speaking countries, mostly the USA (67%). This response pattern was expected because the survey was distributed initially and primarily in the USA. Furthermore, 112 participants specified their first language, and 83% of them were native English speakers.

In terms of education, more than 90% of the respondents (n=118) had a professional degree, and 19% of them had a doctorate. Half of the teachers (51%) majored in TESOL and 23% in Linguistics (n=118). Participants who studied foreign language education constituted only 6%. As Figure 11 shows, most of the participants had formal training in phonetics and phonology. A good number also had been trained through informal study.
Participants for this study were recruited from two main sources. First, the English Language Center (ELC) at Brigham Young University, which was established mainly to provide teaching practice for graduate students enrolled into MA TESOL program. Consequently, although it is possible that some of ELC teachers (especially those who are not MA TESOL students) were very experienced language instructors, most of them were not very experienced ESL teachers. Overall,
about 50 ELC teachers took part in the survey. The second source was the SUPRAS\(^1\) online electronic discussion group. This group consists of over one hundred ESL pronunciation teaching experts. Membership is by invitation only. To be part of the group one has to be experienced not only in teaching ESL in general but in teaching English pronunciation as well. Overall, about 65 SUPRAS pronunciation experts took part in the survey. In addition, both the ELC teachers and the SUPRAS were invited to share the survey link with their colleagues or students. As a result, there might have been a small number of participants who came from neither the ELC nor the SUPRAS group.

The amount of participants’ ESL teaching experience varied widely. The average (mean) number of years was 10 with SD = 7. Twenty two out of 111 teachers had more than 20 years of experience. The respondents were divided into several groups based on their years of teaching ESL experience. The participants with the experience between less than a year and five years constituted the first group. It consisted mostly of ELC teachers (about 85%). Those who had six to ten years of experience were in the second group, and one third of them were ELC teachers. The third group included those who had taught 10–20 years, and about 80% of them were most probably SUPRAS members. Finally, the fourth group consisted of the teachers with more than 20 years of experience and SUPRAS members constituted almost 100% of it (see Figure 12).

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\(^1\) The name SUPRAS comes from the Latin *supra*, a prefix meaning “above” or “over” as in the pronunciation term *suprasegmental*. 
**Figure 12**

*Participants’ Teaching Experience (in Years)*

Responses to the item “How many years have you been teaching English as a second language to adults?”

In addition, among the 109 teachers who reported their pronunciation teaching experience, 86% had taught pronunciation to ESL students. This high percentage was undoubtedly due to the fact that more than a half of the participants were members of the SUPRAS online electronic discussion group, which consists mainly of ESL pronunciation teaching experts. In addition, it was expected that at least some of the ELC teachers had teaching pronunciation experience since pronunciation objectives are part of some ELC courses. Overall, only 11 participants reported that they had never taught pronunciation. Seven of them were from the ELC teachers, and four from the SUPRAS portion of responses. However, since having teaching pronunciation experience is a condition to be a member of the SUPRAS, it is possible to suppose that these four responses came from other than the SUPRAS group. Hence, in general, the group of teachers participating in the study represented mostly experienced ESL pronunciation teachers.
To summarize, the majority of the survey respondents were native speakers of English from the USA and had at least a bachelor’s degree in TESOL or linguistics. Also, they were mostly experienced ESL pronunciation teachers.

**Data elicitation**

An anonymous online electronic survey was designed focusing on the research questions. This survey and the way it was to be distributed were approved by the university institutional review board. Approximately fifteen survey items were created by the researcher initially and then tested during face-to-face interviews with 31 ESL teachers at the ELC. The pilot interviews resulted in adding several new items. Consequently, the final survey (see Appendix) consisted of 23 questions that elicited information about the participants’ level of education, native language, birth country, experience and training in teaching pronunciation to ESL students, and opinions about using phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation. A combination of multiple choice, open-ended and Likert scale questions were utilized to elicit the data.

The main criterion for a potential participant to take part in the survey was having experience teaching ESL to adult students. Hence, the participants did not have to be working as ESL teachers at the moment of taking the survey. In addition, the experience of teaching pronunciation was not obligatory. Even if teachers had never taught pronunciation, they still could have an opinion about the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation to ESL students.

In winter 2020, the survey was distributed online using Qualtrics.com among ESL instructors. First, one of the researchers used the English Language Center directory to reach ESL teachers who were currently working at the center. After the ELC teachers had taken the survey (and no new responses were submitted for a while), another member of our research team invited members of the SUPRAS online electronic discussion group to take the survey.
Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) to answer the first research question, an independent t-test to answer the second question, and grounded theory methodology to answer the third and the fourth questions.

As mentioned above, the respondents were divided into four groups based on their years of teaching ESL experience (see Figure 12). It was done in order to have groups of similar size. In addition, the number of groups was based on the assumption that five, ten, and twenty years are vivid thresholds in a career of a professional and that moving through them can result in some changes in respondents’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic alphabet symbols. Thirteen participants who did not provide their responses about their attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching (in other words who didn’t provide the data for the dependent variable) were eliminated from the quantitative analysis.

Though the survey was anonymous, it was still possible to trace whether an individual response was provided by an experienced or inexperienced teacher. In addition, since ELC and SUPRAS teachers were invited to participate in the survey at different times, it was possible to differentiate their responses from each other by the time stamp of the survey—at least to a certain degree (given that some of the ELC teachers might have provided their responses later together with SUPRAS participants).

Results

This section is divided into four parts according to the four research questions. The findings relevant to each question will be discussed.

Research question 1

Quantitative data were analyzed to find out if the number of years of ESL teaching experience affected the teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in ESL class. The
initial assumption was that the length of teaching experience might influence teachers’ opinions about the effectiveness of different teaching tools. After trying out using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation several times, teachers may or may not see the expected results and consequently, change the way they think about this pronunciation tool.

As Figure 13 illustrates, a Likert-scale item with options ranging from strongly agree (6) to strongly disagree (1) (see Appendix) allowed us to determine the teachers’ overall attitude towards using phonetic symbols in pronunciation instruction. The item was designed with no neutral options on purpose. Since the goal of the survey was to find out the teachers’ attitudes, indifferent choices would not have provided any valuable information. The question was answered by 107 participants irrespective of whether they had had pronunciation teaching experience or not. However, it is important to bear in mind that the whole group of participants consisted mostly of experienced pronunciation teachers. As a result, the findings showed that more than 82% of them had positive rather than negative opinions in reference to phonetic alphabet symbols. This tendency (of mostly positive attitudes) was traced both within ELC and SUPRAS groups. About 78% of the ELC teachers and 85% of the SUPRAS teachers agreed that using phonetic symbols is a valuable use of class time. These data were used to answer the first research question.
The Value of Phonetic Symbol Instruction According to ESL Teachers

Responses to the item “I think using phonetic alphabet symbols to teach pronunciation is a valuable use of class time.”

Assuming that there would be a causal relationship between the number of years of ESL teaching experience and teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, we conducted a one-way between subjects ANOVA. The number of years was the independent variable and the teachers’ attitudes was the dependent one. The results showed that the number of years of teaching experience had no significant effect (at the p<.05 level) on teachers’ attitudes for the three conditions [F (3, 48.5) = 2.42, p = 0.078]. Table 1 and Figure 14 show that the means of all four groups overlapped, and on average they all ranged between somewhat agree (4) and agree (5). In other words, all groups agreed that using phonetic alphabet symbols to teach pronunciation is a valuable use of class time. However, even though there was no statistically significant difference, there was a small to medium effect size difference between the third and fourth groups with Cohen’s d = 0.4. That means that after a threshold of ten years of teaching there was a tendency demonstrating that the more experienced the teachers were, the more positive they were in their attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols. Also, it is worth mentioning that the third and
especially the fourth group consisted mainly of teaching pronunciation experts (SUPRAS group), and these two groups demonstrated a more positive attitude in comparison to the first two groups.

Table 1

Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers with Different Length of Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Descriptives</th>
<th>Teaching Experience Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td></td>
<td>6–10</td>
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<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.232</td>
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<td>11–20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.313</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.266</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14

Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers with Different Lengths of Teaching Experience

Teachers’ Attitudes

Mean (95% CI)
Research Question 2

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols of teachers who had pronunciation teaching experience and those who didn’t. The results showed no significant difference for pronunciation teaching experience (M= 4.41, SD=1.20) and no pronunciation teaching experience (M=4, SD=1.61) conditions; t(105)=1.02, p = 0.308.

As seen in Table 2 and Figure 15, the mean scores for the two groups (4.41 and 4.0) showed that on average both groups preferred the *somewhat agree* (4) option when asked if they considered the use of phonetic alphabet symbols a valuable use of class time. However, the results might had been affected by the sample sizes. The group who had taught pronunciation was substantially larger (n=96) than the group with no pronunciation teaching experience (n=11). If the latter had been larger, a statistically significant difference between the groups might have occurred. Then, possibly we could have traced some practical difference between the two groups showing that previous experience resulted into a slightly more positive attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching ESL pronunciation.
Table 2

Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers With and Without Pronunciation Teaching Experience

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group Descriptives</th>
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<th>Median</th>
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<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15

Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers With and Without Pronunciation Teaching Experience

Research question 3

Several multiple-choice, open-ended and Likert scale questions helped to investigate how ESL teachers with experience teaching pronunciation use phonetic alphabet symbols. The responses provided by open-ended questions were analyzed by means of grounded theory, reviewing the collected data searching for repeated ideas and concepts, then organizing and coding them into several main categories (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p. 231). For greater reliability, about one third of the data (on
disadvantages of phonetic symbols) was reviewed by another rater, who came up with one more category (*boring*) and did not produce two categories (*lack of teacher training* and *too much precision*) that the original researcher did. In sum, out of 83 responses only five were categorized differently by the second rater. There was agreement on 78 of the 83 (an agreement rate of 94%).

A total of 94 respondents confirmed having the experience of teaching pronunciation to adult ESL students. About 40% of them were ELC teachers (who included both relatively inexperienced and experienced pronunciation teachers), and about 60% of them were SUPRAS pronunciation experts. They were further asked by means of a multiple-choice question what pronunciation teaching methods they preferred. Instruction using phonetic alphabet symbols was chosen by 54 respondents, leading us to conclude that this number of teachers had employed this tool in teaching ESL. About 75% of these respondents belonged to the SUPRAS group. Among ELC teachers, who reported using phonetic symbols in their work, only five teachers had less than 5 years of teaching ESL experience. Seven of them had taught ESL for 5-10 years, and finally, two of them had more than ten years of ESL teaching experience (14 and 22 years). Consequently, it is possible to assume that many of them could have been very experienced in teaching pronunciation. Thus, the results discussed below can be considered to be mostly the opinions of very experienced pronunciation teachers who had thought about the topic of phonetic symbols deeply and based their responses on their practical experience.

Out of the 54 respondents who reported using phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation:

- 45 felt confident using the technique in class;
- 44 had taught their students to use phonetic alphabet symbols to learn how to pronounce words on their own outside of class;
- 33 preferred to teach selected symbols instead of the whole alphabet.

In addition to these quantitative results, qualitative responses from 32 participants answered the question about what symbols the respondents preferred to use and/or teach in class. Two thirds of these responses came from SUPRAS pronunciation experts. Overall, 19 respondents mentioned that
they used the symbols standing for English vowels. The symbol for the schwa sound turned out to be
the most frequently used and was referred to by 14 participants. Three participants mentioned that
they use phonetic symbols to introduce short vs long vowel pairs. Six participants specified that they
taught all English vowels using phonetic symbols. A total of 15 respondents indicated that they used
the symbols standing for some English consonants. The symbols representing the th-sounds (like in
these and think) were the most frequently used (10 references). Other consonants mentioned by
participants (between one and three references each) were the following: /ʃ/ (like in chair), /ʒ/ (like in
jam), /ʃ/ (like in shoe), /ʒ/ (like in usually), /v/ (like in two), /d/ (like in day), /ŋ/ (like in king), and r
(like in rock). Four participants pointed out that the choice of symbols to teach depended on things
such as their students’ needs, the focus of pronunciation instruction and the vocabulary being
introduced. Finally, three participants (all of them were SUPRAS pronunciation experts) preferred to
teach all English phonemes using phonetic symbols.

Fifty-one respondents explained briefly how they usually used phonetic alphabet symbols in
teaching pronunciation. Again, about 75% of the responses came from SUPRAS pronunciation
experts. Focusing on specific sounds that are especially difficult (mostly vowels, the schwa sound and
certain consonants) seemed to be the most frequently mentioned way they used phonetic symbols in
class (15 references). For example, as one of the participants explained (most likely a SUPRAS
member who reported having seven years of teaching ESL experience), “Sometimes they [phonetic
symbols] are not needed unless there is a novel sound, or if a students' L1 has only one sound where
the L2 has e.g. two, it can be useful to have a symbol to represent it.”

Showing the contrast between sounds (that are not necessarily difficult by themselves) was
another commonly mentioned class activity where participants considered phonetic symbols useful
(11 references). The teachers used symbols to show the difference between minimal pairs and explain
the pronunciation of homographs and words that are typically confusing to ESL students (e.g. desert
vs dessert, ether vs either, etc.). In addition, one of the comments stated (most likely by a SUPRAS
pronunciation expert with six years of ESL teaching experience), phonetic symbols are helpful when
“there is a need to show that a vowel letter can make many different sounds and classify syllables and words based on the vowel sound.”

Seven respondents pointed out the use of phonetic symbols as a reference while talking about English sounds. Their comments made it clear that symbols help the teachers and their students be “on the same page”, knowing exactly which sound/s they are working on. As one participant (most likely a SUPRAS pronunciation expert with seven years of ESL teaching experience) said, “When introducing a new sound or sound contrast, I often use a symbol that indicates the sound. They [phonetic symbols] are not a big deal and students don't have to memorize them, but they allow me an easier way to talk about a sound.”

Five participants mentioned the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in order to raise their students’ awareness. One (most likely) pronunciation expert with nine years of ESL teaching experience provided some details on the process, “At the beginning of the semester, I teach my students basic IPA and test them on knowing the symbols/anatomy involved in American English sounds. This sets them up for better understanding the lessons in the class and gives them the power to better analyze their own speech.”

Among other class activities involving phonetic alphabet symbols, the following were mentioned by respondents (the number of respondents mentioning each activity is shown in parenthesis):

- Teaching spelling and reading (5);
- Explaining the articulation of English sounds (4);
- Introducing and practicing vocabulary (4);
- Teaching how to use dictionaries (3);
- Transcribing words, phrases and sentences (3);
- Providing feedback (2).

As can be seen from these responses, experienced ESL pronunciation teachers who employed phonetic alphabet symbols as a part of their instruction, felt confident using them in class and were
more likely to utilize some specific symbols instead of introducing the whole alphabet to their students. In addition, the teachers demonstrated that the range of phonetic symbols taught can be broad, and there are various ways to employ this tool in class.

**Research question 4**

The fourth research question aimed to investigate ESL teachers’ opinions about the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation and if these opinions support the pros and the cons mentioned in the literature review.

**ESL teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching.**

As mentioned in the section devoted to the quantitative results and illustrated by Figure 13, 82% of 107 participants considered phonetic-symbols based instruction a valuable use of class time. Furthermore, as Figure 16 demonstrates, 94 (that is 88%) of 107 participants agreed that the students’ ability to figure out the pronunciation of words in dictionaries with the help of phonetic symbols is an important skill to teach. Among the participants of the group that consisted mostly of ELC teachers, 40 participants agreed with the statement. This number included six participants who had never taught pronunciation, 22 participants who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching, and 12 participants who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. The group that consisted primarily of SUPRAS pronunciation experts had 53 participants who agreed that teaching students to check pronunciation of words in dictionaries is useful. Fifteen of them did not use phonetic symbols, and 38 used phonetic symbols in teaching. Consequently, we may see that the group of participants who agreed that it is worth teaching students to check the pronunciation of words in dictionaries was diverse and included not very experienced and very experienced teachers, teachers who used phonetic symbols and who did not. However, 50 teachers (12 ELC and 38 SUPRAS teachers) who had taught pronunciation and used phonetic symbols constituted the core of the group that agreed with the statement.

It is interesting though, when asked the question (mentioned earlier in this paper) regarding the ways experienced (in teaching pronunciation) teachers employ phonetic symbols in class, only
three participants pointed out directly that they utilized symbols for the purpose of teaching how to use dictionaries. Of course, these results might be explained by the general nature of the question itself (Could you explain briefly how you use phonetic alphabet symbols instruction in teaching pronunciation?) that can be interpreted differently. However, about 85% of the responses demonstrated clearly that teaching students to check out pronunciation of words in dictionaries was not the first option. For example, many participants used the words “only” or “strictly” to clarify that the way they were reporting using phonetic symbols was their only one option. This suggests that though experienced teachers admitted the value of students’ having skill to find out the pronunciation of words independently (in dictionaries), they did not teach it.
Figure 16

Teachers’ Opinion About the Value of Students’ Ability to Decipher Phonetic Symbols

Responses to the item “I think ESL students’ ability to look up a word and figure out its pronunciation with the help of a phonetic alphabet outside the classroom is a useful skill that is worth teaching.”

Why teachers did not use phonetic symbols.

In addition, 40 participants who did not choose Phonetic Alphabet Symbols Instruction option were asked to explain why. Overall, 39 participants responded to the question. Twenty-five of them were ELC teachers and 14 SUPRAS pronunciation experts. Ten ELC teachers and six SUPRAS explained that they did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation because phonetic symbols are too overwhelming and confusing for students. This was the most commonly mentioned reason. As one (most likely) SUPRAS member with seven years of teaching ESL experience stated, “I find it [phonetic alphabet instruction] often confuses students and is far too esoteric to be useful in a language learning environment.” One of the ELC teachers who had taught ESL for three years shared the same thoughts, “It was too difficult for ESL students to understand the difference between IPA and English spelling when they were trying to study spelling of their new vocabulary.”
Lack of training was another commonly mentioned explanation why the participants preferred to avoid phonetic symbols in their work. Overall, there were 11 references to this issue. Although, four responses came from SUPRAS batch, two of them indicated only two years of teaching ESL experience. Consequently, it is possible that these answers were from other than SUPRAS sources. The participants admitted that they either did not know phonetic symbols or knew them not well enough to feel comfortable to teach them to students. Here are some examples of their comments: “I don't feel like I have enough education to use it effectively.” “Not as familiar with the sounds.” “It's a little harder to explain things that way. I don't feel as confident when using it.” “I don't think I'm comfortable enough with any phonetic alphabet to use it to teach my students.” “Not comfortable enough with the system to teach it to others.”

Seven participants (three ELC teachers and four SUPRAS) referred to students’ proficiency level when explaining why they opted not to use phonetic symbols. However, their responses were contradictory. Five respondents believed that phonetic symbols instruction is not appropriate for low level students (because they already have to learn Latin alphabet, and phonetic symbols will confuse them). On the other hand, two participants stated that since they were teaching high level proficiency students, they did not need phonetic symbols instruction.

Five participants (four ELC teachers and one SUPRAS) complained that teaching phonetic symbols takes too much time. As one of them (SUPRAS with nine years of teaching ESL experience) stated, “I find it takes too much time to teach the students IPA when we have lots of other topics to cover.” An ELC teacher who had also taught ESL for nine years expresses the same idea, “With limited instructional time, it would seem difficult to teach students IPA on top of the course objectives without solid research indicating that this would be effective.”

Five references (four by ELC teachers and one from SUPRAS) indicated that some teachers believed that using phonetic symbols makes sense only if students already know them. As one inexperienced teacher (one year of teaching experience) shared, “I used phonetic alphabet symbols once to explain pronunciation, but the students didn't know it.”
Finally, one SUPRAS member with more than 20 years of teaching experience believed that students do not need phonetic symbols. As this participant stated, “As a teacher I need to know it [phonetic symbols]; my students don't need to, except occasionally for specific purposes.” One participant (SUPRAS, seven years of teaching experience) mentioned that rather than teaching phonetic symbols to students, “it is more effective when students can mimic sounds they hear.” One ELC teacher (four years of teaching experience) believed that “any smart phone that has a dictionary can also sound out the pronunciation for the learner, thus making the need for Phonetic Alphabet instruction unnecessary.” One SUPRAS (17 years of teaching experience) didn't “find this [teaching phonetic symbols] a helpful way of teaching.” Unfortunately, this participant did not provide any additional information. One teacher (ELC teacher with three years of teaching experience) mentioned that phonetic symbols instruction “hasn’t been a part of the curriculum” this participant had taught. However, the curriculum was not the only obstacle since this participant added, “I haven’t taken the time to learn how to use this method, nor have I really considered it.” Another ELC teacher (three years of teaching experience) confessed that “never thought to use the phonetic alphabet to teach students pronunciation.”

To summarize, the most common reasons why teachers did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation were the following:

- Phonetic symbols are confusing (especially for low level students).
- Teachers are not trained how to teach phonetic symbols.
- Phonetic symbols are not appropriate for all levels of proficiency.
- Teaching phonetic symbols is time-consuming.
- Phonetic symbols are useful only if students know them already.

Advantages of the use of phonetic alphabet symbols according to ESL teachers.

Eighty-four respondents to the survey shared their opinions regarding the advantages of using phonetic alphabet symbols in pronunciation instruction. More than half of them, about 45 participants,
were from the SUPRAS batch of responses that included both pronunciation experts who employed phonetic symbols in their work and those who didn’t. About 35 of the respondents mostly belonged to the ELC teachers that included a variety of teachers in terms of their pronunciation teaching experience, from those who had never taught to very experienced teachers. Their responses were examined, and five common topics emerged, which are listed and discussed below (in order of their frequency in participant responses). The number of respondents mentioning this activity is shown in parentheses. Both ELC and SUPRAS groups demonstrated unity in their opinions regarding the advantages of the use of phonetic symbols. There was almost no difference in the ranking of the following main topics between the two groups.

**Phonetic alphabet symbols**

- enable independent learning (31)
- can be used as a teacher’s tool to refer to sounds (15)
- solve the problem of sound-spelling inconsistency (14)
- increase students’ awareness of English phonemes (14)
- provide visual representations of the sounds (9)

**Phonetic alphabet symbols instruction enables independent learning.**

Helping students develop the skill to check pronunciation autonomously in their dictionaries was by far the most frequently mentioned benefit of phonetic alphabet symbols instruction. Overall, 30 comments (17 from ELC teachers and 14 from SUPRAS teachers) promoted the idea of teaching phonetic symbols to enable students to become more independent learners. For example, one (most likely) SUPRAS pronunciation expert with seven years of teaching experience, who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, reported, “I have had multiple students use their understanding of phonetics to look up words on their own. It helps them be independent and build skills without the need for teacher feedback.” Here are some examples from other pronunciation experts with teaching experience of more than 20 years who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation: “Students become more autonomous when studying and practicing pronunciation.” “Students can identify
correct pronunciation of words on their own.” “It allows autonomous learning.” Both experienced and inexperienced ELC teachers supported pronunciation teaching experts’ opinions. For example, one of the ELC teachers, who had taught ESL for 17 years and had taught pronunciation without the use of phonetic symbols, stated, “Students can use that knowledge [of phonetic symbols] outside the classroom on their own.” One of less experienced ELC teachers, who had taught ESL for two years and had taught pronunciation without the use of phonetic symbols, expressed the same opinion as well, “They [phonetic symbols] help students’ study of the language outside of the classroom.” The teachers, who reported having no experience in teaching pronunciation at all, also demonstrated the same views. One of them (four years of teaching ESL experience) stated, “[Phonetic symbols] enable students to learn pronunciation on their own.”

These results confirmed the abovementioned contradictory situation that exists between teachers’ opinions and what actually happens in classrooms. Although the participants understand the usefulness of phonetic symbols to check pronunciation of words independently, only three respondents out of 120 indicated that they actually taught this skill.

**Phonetic symbols can be used as a teacher’s tool to refer to sounds.**

Providing clear and unambiguous instruction is crucial at any level while teaching ESL pronunciation. Since there are fewer letters in the Roman alphabet than there are English phonemes, it might become problematic for teachers to talk about the sounds using Roman letters as a reference. Students might get confused and think of a different phoneme from the one the teacher means. Hence, language instructors often need a more precise reference tool. Fifteen participants in this study (five ELC teachers and 10 SUPRAS teachers) believed that phonetic alphabet symbols can effectively serve the purpose of referring precisely to specific sounds and pointed this out as an advantage. Seven of them reported using phonetic symbols as a reference tool throughout instruction while talking about the sounds of English. For example, one of the SUPRAS respondents with eight years of teaching experience explained, “They [phonetic symbols] provide a way of clarifying exactly which vowel sounds we're talking about.” Another SUPRAS pronunciation expert with 19 years of teaching experience believed that the advantage of the use of phonetic symbols is “To make sure we all are
talking about the same sound.” Both of these teachers reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. In addition, some teachers thought of phonetic symbols as a way to refer to phonemes while correcting students. For example, one of the ELC teachers with seven years of teaching experience who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation clarified, “It's like having everyone use the same abbreviation key for writing feedback.”

**Phonetic alphabet symbols solve the problem of sound-spelling inconsistency.**

Fourteen respondents (four ELC teachers and 10 SUPRAS teachers) agreed that phonetic symbols are helpful in minimizing the “confusion that comes with ordinary English orthography,” since one phonetic symbol stands for one and only one sound. Here are some examples of SUPRAS pronunciation experts’ comments with more than 20 years of teaching ESL experience who reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation: “They [phonetic symbols] consistently represent sounds that may have many different spellings. They distinguish among different vowels that can be spelled similarly.” “[The use of phonetic symbols] emphasizes limited sound-letter correspondence in English (i.e., 16 vowel sounds--5 vowel letters).” “[Phonetic symbols] highlight differences between spelling and pronunciation.” Though there were less comments about solving the problem of sound-spelling inconsistency as an advantage of phonetic symbols use among ELC teachers, some of them expressed the same ideas. For example, one teacher with three years of teaching ESL experience, who had taught pronunciation but reported not using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, stated, “The English letters have so many different sounds for one letter that it could be useful to teach specific IPA sounds in order to assist students.”

**Phonetic alphabet symbols increase students’ awareness of English phonemes.**

Though the word *awareness* in reference to the positive impact of phonetic symbols instruction was brought up only by three participants, the idea of it was discussed by many of them, mostly SUPRAS pronunciation teaching experts who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. Overall, there were 14 references to phonetic awareness brought up by the use of phonetic symbols. Eleven of them came from SUPRAS pronunciation experts with many years of
teaching ESL experience (at least five of them had more than 20 years of experience). Only two of them did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. For example, some of the respondents mentioned, that phonetic symbols instruction can enhance students’ understanding of English sounds. Others noted, that it can help students in differentiating and analyzing some similar phonemes, for example those in minimal pairs. Here’s an example of such a comment provided by one of the SUPRAS pronunciation experts with teaching ESL experience of more than 20 years (used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation), “ESL students often struggle with distinguishing between English vowel sounds. IPA symbols with short example words can help students to recognize the difference in pronunciation and produce the correct sounds, such as in the word pair "liar / lawyer," or "pen/pan/pain."

**Phonetic alphabet symbols provide visual representations of the sounds.**

Nine participants (two ELC teachers and seven SUPRAS teachers) believed that phonetic symbols are useful as a visual aid for adult students. According to the comments, the teachers support the argument, discussed above in the literature review section, that seeing speech sounds represented by symbols can enhance students’ ability to identify the sounds better. As one ELC participant with four years of teaching ESL experience (who had the experience of teaching pronunciation and used phonetic symbols in teaching) noted, “Many students cannot hear the distinct sounds of the language they’re learning in the beginning. Seeing that there is a symbol to represent the unique sound you're trying to teach is extremely helpful.” Here are some comments from more experienced (more than 20 years of teaching ESL experience) SUPRAS teachers, who reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation and stated the same point of view: “Students are able to associate a specific sound to a specific visual support.” “They [phonetic symbols] help clarify, because the ears alone are not always reliable.” In addition, as another SUPRAS participant (more than 20 years of ESL teaching experience, reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation) explained that seeing phonetic symbols can enhance students’ memory capacity. “It [the use of phonetic symbols] is a useful visual aid to trigger memory of the lesson and therefore the sound” stated this pronunciation expert.
Other benefits of phonetic alphabet symbols instruction.

In addition, according to the respondents, phonetic alphabet symbols can also:

- increase students’ intelligibility (4)
- help teachers overcome accent differences (2)
- make teaching pronunciation precise (2)
- save time when students already know them (1)

Finally, one participant who was most likely an ELC teacher and who reported having taught pronunciation but not using phonetic symbols, was not sure if there were any advantages in the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation.

Disadvantages of the use of phonetic symbols according to ESL teachers.

Overall, 83 participants (38 ELC teachers and 45 SUPRAS) shared their thoughts about the disadvantages of the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. These opinions share a lot in common with the reasons why (mostly ELC and less experienced) teachers did not use phonetic symbols which were mentioned above. There was almost no difference in opinions and ranking of the main categories between the ELC teachers and SUPRAS. The following three main categories emerged from their responses (the number of respondents mentioning this activity is shown in parenthesis):

- Learning phonetic symbols can be overwhelming and confusing (45).
- Teaching phonetic symbols can be time-consuming (25).
- There are other ways to teach English phonemes (11).

Phonetic alphabet symbols can be overwhelming and confusing.

Many teachers (19 ELC teachers and 26 SUPRAS) perceived phonetic alphabet symbols as something too hard, confusing and cognitively overloading for students to learn. Overall there were 45 references to phonetic symbols as “difficult”, “overwhelming”, “burdening”, “complicated”,

49
“stressful”, “confusing” even “daunting”, etc. In about 90% of the situations the respondents related this to the necessity for students to remember an extra set of symbols apart from the regular English alphabet or just on top of everything else that they have to learn. As one SUPRAS pronunciation expert with more than 20 years of teaching ESL experience, who used phonetic symbols in teaching, commented, “Some learners might find it difficult to learn additional symbols, i.e., additional to the letters of the alphabet.” Another SUPRAS member with 11 years of teaching ESL experience, but who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, expressed the same idea, “It’s one more thing for students to learn and master, another whole alphabet....” Both very experienced and less experienced ELC teachers also supported this point of view. For example, one of the ELC teachers with 10 years of teaching experience, who had taught pronunciation but did not use phonetic symbols, stated that learning phonetic symbols is like learning another language in addition to English.

The most common concern in terms of phonetic symbols being overwhelming and confusing expressed by the respondents was about novice level, illiterate students, and those whose first language does not use the Latin alphabet. For example, here is a couple of responses provided by SUPRAS members with more than 20 years of teaching ESL experience, who reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation: “Occasionally a student who is less literate in their L1 or has less formal education can get overwhelmed at this new code.” “It is another alphabet for learners who do not have a Latin alphabet, e.g., Chinese learners.” Another SUPRAS member who also had more than 20 years of experience but did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation gave the following example, “Low literacy students, students whose languages use a different alphabet, may be burdened by having to learn ABCs as well as phonetic symbols.” The ELC teachers were talking about the same groups of students. Here is an example provided by one of the ELC teachers with six years of teaching ESL experience, who had taught pronunciation but did not resort to phonetic symbols, “For students who are not literate, either at all (e.g., students who never learned literacy even in their first language) or in English (e.g., students whose first language doesn't use the Roman alphabet), it could be extremely confusing to have to learn essentially double the number of letter-sound correspondences.” In addition, the teachers assumed that learning phonetic symbols can interfere with such students’
development of spelling and reading skills. As one SUPRAS member with nine years of teaching ESL experience, who reported using phonetic symbols, stated, “Students may see it as another alphabet and confuse the two; confuse it with spelling.”

Only two respondents connected the idea of phonetic symbols being confusing with the problem of different inventories of symbols. “Dictionaries and textbooks often use different symbol sets, so this can be confusing for students. In a course where pronunciation is not the main focus, I likely would not focus much on the phonetic alphabet,” explained one of them. Another one stated the same idea, “They [phonetic symbols] vary from dictionary to dictionary and between pronunciation texts so students can get easily confused. They need a lot of exposure to remember them or else be able to consult a chart.” Both of these respondents were SUPRAS members with many years of teaching ESL experience (19 and more than 20) who used phonetic symbols in their work.

There were three responses (two from the ELC teachers and one from SUPRAS) where the idea of phonetic symbols being confusing was related to teachers. To be more specific, two of the participants explained that phonetic symbols may be hard and confusing for teachers to remember and teach. For example, the SUPRAS member, who had 21 years of teaching ESL experience, admitted, “Symbols are confusing. Honestly, I struggle to remember them.” Unsurprisingly, this participant reported not using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. One ELC teacher (6 years of teaching ESL experience) who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation suggested that “some alphabets are hard to teach and may be unfamiliar to the teacher.” Finally, one ELC teacher (5 years of teaching ESL experience), who did not resort to phonetic symbols, stated that phonetic symbols “could be confusing if the teacher doesn't know how to present them.” This way this participant underlined the importance of teachers being trained how to teach phonetic symbols to avoid confusion among students.

To summarize, the most commonly mentioned disadvantage of the use of phonetic symbols was related to the necessity to remember extra symbols (apart from Latin alphabet) by novice, illiterate students and/or students whose L1 is not based on Latin alphabet. This can make students feel cognitively overwhelmed/confused and interfere with their development of writing and reading.
skills. This point of view was supported both by the ELC teachers and SUPRAS independently if they had used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation or not.

**Teaching phonetic alphabet symbols can be time consuming.**

Another popular complaint in reference to the use and teaching of phonetic alphabet symbols was about the amount of time it requires. According to teachers’ opinions, they have “lots of other topics to cover,” and “it would seem difficult to teach students IPA on top of the course objectives.” This issue was mentioned by 25 participants (11 ELC teachers and 14 SUPRAS). Some of them believed that it is extremely hard to teach phonetic symbols effectively within a short period of time. Consequently, it’s not worth doing if there’s no time for it. There won’t be enough benefits. As one ELC teacher, who had taught ESL for eight years and used phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation, stated, “It takes too much time to teach it well.” One of the SUPRAS teachers with 11 years of teaching experience, who also reported using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, explained the issue in the following way, “In a course of general study I think that teaching the IPA is a time-consuming task and that it may not be the best use of time.”

Others supposed that it can even hurt the whole process of teaching pronunciation because there won’t be any time left for other useful pronunciation activities. As one of the SUPRAS teachers, who had taught ESL for six years and used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, responded, “Too much of the class time spent on metalanguage and symbols, leaving too little class time for practicing and actually improving pronunciation.” Some less experience teachers who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation stated the same point of view. For example, here is a comment provided by one of the ELC teachers with only three years of teaching experience, “[Teaching phonetic symbols] takes time away from actual practice of pronunciation or other skills.”

To summarize, the second commonly mentioned disadvantage of the use of phonetic symbols is that teaching phonetic symbols is too time-consuming. Since there are many other priorities and objectives that seem to be more important to teachers, they might feel reluctant to teach phonetic symbols to their students.
There are other ways to teach English phonemes.

In terms of other ways to teach pronunciation, two SUPRAS pronunciation experts with more than 20 years of teaching ESL experience indicated that the Color Vowel Chart works better than phonetic symbols for their students. Both of them reported using phonetic symbols in teaching though. One more SUPRAS member with 11 years of teaching experience who also used phonetic symbols in teaching mentioned phonetic respelling as one of the possible options to demonstrate pronunciation of words.

Eight participants (four ELC teachers and (most likely) four SUPRAS) assumed that “since the students can hear the pronunciation of any word they want” (meaning it is possible to listen how English words are pronounced using online dictionaries and other internet resources), it is unnecessary to represent speech sounds visually. Hence, they considered phonetic alphabet symbols as something redundant. As one SUPRAS member with 14 years of teaching ESL experience who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation stated, “In most cases students can listen to pronunciations when they look up a word nowadays. With limited class time I have other priorities.” Here is another SUPRAS who had taught ESL for seven years without the use of phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation expressing the same idea, “With electronic dictionaries, written pronunciation is somewhat redundant, and hearing the word is generally more effective. Written pronunciation does not always account for things like accent and intonation.” It is worth mentioning thought that all but one of the participants who supported the idea that hearing a word is enough for adults to learn to pronounce it were either teachers who had no experience in teaching pronunciation or those who did not use phonetic symbols in their work.

Other disadvantages of phonetic alphabet symbols instruction.

Some ideas about the disadvantages of the use of phonetic symbols were mentioned by the participants much less often. However, they are worth paying attention to as well. According to the respondents, phonetic alphabet symbols instruction can:

- be sensitive to insufficient teacher training (4).
fail to represent different accents (4).

focuse too much attention on precision (1).

Interestingly, accent and precision were mentioned by the participants in relation to advantages of the use of phonetic symbols as well as to its disadvantages. For example, on the one hand, an ELC teacher (had five years of teaching ESL experience), who had taught pronunciation but did not use phonetic symbols, suggested that with the help of phonetic symbols “students can learn how a word sounds without relying on a teacher's accent.” On the other hand, as one ELC teacher (six years of teaching ESL experience), who also had taught pronunciation without phonetic symbols, stated, “There are often times that I, as a native speaker, say a word differently than indicated in the dictionary pronunciation guide. Sometimes multiple pronunciations are indicated, but the students don't know which would be most common in the region where they will be using English.” Same situation with precision. Here are the opinions of two SUPRAS members. Both of them had taught ESL more than 20 years and used phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation. However, one of them believed that the use of phonetic symbols “allows precise expression of pronunciation” while the other one expressed the idea that phonetic symbols, “may encourage an inappropriate focus on precision.” It’s also worth noting that, neither of the topics (accent and precision) were discussed in literature and present new ideas to consider.

Finally, nine participants (2 ELC teachers and 7 SUPRAS) indicated that they were not aware of any disadvantages of phonetic alphabet symbols practice.

Summary of Findings

The quantitative analysis showed no statistically significant effect of the length of ESL teachers’ teaching experience or previous pronunciation teaching experience on teachers’ attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in class. However, the tendency was traced showing that the more experienced ESL teachers were, the more positive their attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols were. Overall, the greater part of the participants (who represented experienced pronunciation ESL teachers) expressed more positive rather than negative attitudes towards the use of
phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. In addition, the participants’ views on disadvantages and disadvantages of the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation coincided with all the reasons mentioned in the literature review. Enabling students’ independent learning was the most commonly mentioned advantage and being too cognitively overwhelming and time-consuming were the most frequent complaints about using phonetic symbols.

**Discussion**

The results of our survey confirmed that the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching English pronunciation remains a controversial issue. Though there were more participants who used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, the number of the participants who did not use phonetic symbols was not much less (54 and 40 correspondingly). Furthermore, the respondents mentioned all the advantages and disadvantages discussed in literature (plus some additional ones) illustrating teachers’ beliefs that the use of phonetic symbols can be either beneficial or useless and (even harmful for students). The additional insights that the respondents provided also had a dichotomous nature occasionally. For example, the teachers mentioned the accent challenge as something that phonetic alphabet symbols can solve and, vice versa, something that can make the use of symbols pointless.

Perhaps the most striking conflict indicated by the results is the dissonance between teachers’ opinions and their actual practice in class. Though with a different degree of confidence, 82% of the participants, including those who didn’t indicate they ever resorted to phonetic symbols in their work, considered the use of this tool in teaching pronunciation as a valuable way to spend class time. And yet, the fact that the technique takes too much time was one of the problems that the teachers most frequently reported. Students’ ability to decipher the pronunciation of phonetically transcribed words in dictionaries on their own was regarded as a useful skill that is worth teaching by 88% of the participants. In addition, this skill was the most frequently mentioned advantage of the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL teaching. However, according to the obtained data, at the time they took the survey only three participants reported that they were actually teaching phonetic symbols to their students to help them use dictionaries independently.
The teaching context, in which teachers frequently have to make difficult choices about what and how to teach, may serve as a possible key to understanding this significant gap between teachers’ attitudes towards using phonetic symbols and their actual use of phonetic symbols. Teachers are often limited in their decisions by course objectives, by their students’ needs and individual differences, and by many other circumstances. For example, the teachers who took part in the pilot interviews for this study often mentioned that they did not use phonetic symbols only because the courses they were teaching at that moment either didn’t include teaching pronunciation at all, or pronunciation improvement was the lowest priority course objective. In such circumstances, no matter how positively teachers perceive a technique or tool, the possibility of their using it may be greatly reduced, and little can or should be done about it.

Furthermore, as the qualitative data demonstrate, the perceived disadvantages of using phonetic alphabet symbols may be so significant that no matter how valuable and useful they might be, teachers avoid them (or use them less), even if they are otherwise free to use phonetic symbols. If it is possible to help teachers remove the obstacles they come across when teaching their students phonetic symbols, the benefits of the tool may improve the quality of pronunciation instruction, and teachers may instruct their students how to check out the pronunciation of words in dictionaries more often.

As the results of our survey show, the two main challenges that the teachers we surveyed had to confront while teaching phonetic symbols were (a) cognitive overload for students and (b) lack of class time. However, some of the teachers reported that it is possible to teach phonetic symbols within a short period of time and without overwhelming students. As one ELC teacher who had taught ESL for more than 20 years and used phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation stated, “It takes time and a lot of work to teach the phonetic alphabet to students. BUT I can quickly and easily teach it, and I do teach it.” Furthermore, one participant (an ELC teacher with five years of teaching ESL experience who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation) expressed the following idea, “It [a phonetic alphabet] could be confusing if the teacher doesn't know how to present it.” These responses imply that it depends on a teacher if phonetic symbols are confusing for students or not. Another
comment from one of the SUPRAS respondents (11 years of ESL teaching experience), who used phonetic symbols in teaching, stated “Some teachers are scared of using the chart as they are not confident to use it. In my experience as a teacher trainer, once the teachers are familiar with the chart, they are keen to use it with their learners.” According to these participants, it is not about phonetic symbols being hard and confusing, it is about a teacher’s skill to teach them effectively.

Furthermore, as one of the ELC teachers (14 years of teaching ESL experience), who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, noted, “If all the students knew the exact sounds represented by the phonetic alphabet, it would take less explanation time each time a particular sound was encountered.” Atkielski (2019) supports this idea stating that “once they [students] learn the IPA (which they can often manage in an hour or two …), the advantages of being able to understand and write phonetic transcriptions more than compensate for the time required to learn the alphabet” (p. 2).

If these assumptions are true and it is feasible to teach phonetic alphabet symbols in a simple way without spending too much time on it, then it’s reasonable to suppose that the remaining challenges with respect to phonetic symbols instruction are caused by teachers’ lack of training. This brings us to the next most frequently mentioned disadvantage of using phonetic symbols. The success of using them depends a lot on teachers’ knowledge and skills. Hence, the next question to answer is whether ESL teachers are trained to teach phonetic symbols to ESL students?

According to the survey results, formal study was the main source of the participants’ knowledge about phonetics and phonology. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that teacher education can sometimes include phonetic alphabet symbols instruction. Why then so few participants stated that they knew how to teach phonetic symbols quickly and in a simple way?

The pilot interviews cast light upon the issue. Almost all of the 31 interviewees answered affirmatively the question that asked if they had ever been instructed how to use phonetic alphabet symbols in their own study. However, only one of them said yes when asked if she had been instructed formally how to teach phonetic symbols to ESL students. The fact is that linguistic training is not the same thing as pedagogic training. There is a difference between instruction that provides knowledge about a linguistic topic and instruction that demonstrates how to teach this topic to others,
especially to students who do not have any linguistic background (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 295). Therefore, even if ESL teachers are introduced to a phonetic alphabet, for example, the IPA, as a part of a linguistic course, it doesn’t mean they know how to teach it to students.

Some of the survey participants’ comments illustrated this point vividly. “To me, the IPA is more of a linguistic tool than a teaching tool,” stated one of the ELC teachers who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. “I am not sure how to introduce difficult linguistic terms like alveolar, fricatives, etc. Thus, it may take many hours of class time”, responded another ELC teacher (with three years of teaching ESL experience, who did not use phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation) when asked about the disadvantages of phonetic symbols instruction. Apparently, this participant didn’t know that teaching phonetic symbols doesn’t necessarily entail using linguistic terms or teaching phonetic theory (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 294). Moreover, one of the interviewees explained, that in her undergraduate program not only were students not instructed how to teach phonetic alphabet symbols but were even discouraged from using them in teaching. Further she shared some more details, “I remember one professor saying it [the IPA] was outdated. They [teachers] were pushing for communicative language teaching, and IPA was much a more audio-lingual method. So, they disregarded it”. Obviously, such an approach in teacher training doesn’t help language instructors to learn how to teach phonetic symbols effectively.

Finally, the following comment from one of the ELC teachers (16 years of teaching experience, who had taught pronunciation but did not use phonetic symbols) vividly illustrates the irony of the situation. “I just use it for my own information, for example, when I look a word up in a dictionary. Unless the students are already familiar with it, it seems like it would involve a lot of pre-teaching,” stated this participant. According to this comment, teachers are taught to use phonetic symbols, and they use them for their own benefit, but they refuse their students in this benefit just because it is too hard and takes a lot of time to teach phonetic symbols. However, if someone else would have done the job and taught students how to use phonetic symbols, it would be nice.

Perhaps being introduced to phonetic symbols as part of a linguistic course (vs part of a teacher training one) is the reason why many teachers in this study expressed their concern about low
level and illiterate students. It is very hard to imagine how to share the knowledge one gets as a
linguist with students who do not even know how write (even in their L1). The comments like the
following (given by one of the SUPRAS with 17 years of experience who did not use phonetic
symbols in teaching pronunciation) illustrate this vividly, “[Phonetic symbols] can be confusing for
learners, especially those not following an academic linguistics program.” According to this
participant only students who study linguistics are able to understand phonetic symbols well. Here is
another comment from an ELC teacher (with one year of teaching experience, who used phonetic
symbols in teaching pronunciation) supporting the same idea, “It [phonetic symbols instruction] can
sometimes overwhelm native speakers, therefore, it can be really challenging for ESL students, too.”
In addition, apparently being introduced to phonetic symbols as a part of a linguistic course can create
an impression that this is the only appropriate way to learn about phonetic symbols. Otherwise, why
would some teachers expect someone else to teach their students to use phonetic symbols providing
the comments like the following one. “Not sure how many students know it and I myself am rusty
because I don’t use it often. So, I tend to not use it much,” confessed one of the SUPRAS with 11
years of teaching experience. It creates a follow-up question, where their students are supposed to get
this knowledge unless their ESL teacher teaches them?

There was one more issue related to the lack of teacher training in terms of teaching
pronunciation that was clearly demonstrated by the survey results. Some ESL teachers (including
SUPRAS pronunciation experts) still believe that it is enough for an adult learner to hear in order to
acquire the phonemes of a new language. The comments like the following, “They can use the
internet to hear and imitate the pronunciation” illustrated that some teachers are not aware of the
processes of obtaining second language pronunciation by adult learners, and what challenges such
learners have to face. Consequently, these teachers consider phonetic symbols a redundancy and never
use them, which is not a problem since it is possible to teach pronunciation successfully without
phonetic symbols. The problem is when teachers, based on the assumption that hearing is enough,
believe that for effective pronunciation instruction it is enough to provide students with occasional
listen-and-repeat activities and nothing else.
To sum up, the results of this study indicated that experienced ESL pronunciation teachers have an overall positive attitude towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation and are aware of the many benefits this tool can bring forth. For example, helping students utilize the full potential of dictionaries and textbooks was considered as one of the most important reasons to teach phonetic symbols. However, very few teachers chose to instruct their students to check words in a dictionary using phonetic symbols, possibly because they believed it is too overwhelming for students and time-consuming. This situation allows us to assume that teacher training-programs usually do not instruct novice teachers how to teach phonetic alphabet symbols to ESL students. Given that this study presents the opinions of experienced teachers, it might indicate that many teachers remain clueless of how to use phonetic symbols (especially, to teach their students to check the pronunciation of words in dictionaries) without getting students overwhelmed and spending too much time on it. Therefore, it is advisable to include phonetic alphabet symbol instruction into teacher-training programs at least as an optional element. This way the teachers who are interested in using phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation can develop the necessary skills.

**Pedagogical implications**

According to the survey results, the lack of time and students’ feeling overwhelmed with additional information to remember are the two main challenges that teachers face in relation to teaching phonetic symbols in ESL classes. This section will discuss several general guidelines from the literature review that can be helpful in overcoming these difficulties.

First, in most situations, ESL students do not need to learn the whole alphabet. For example, though the full IPA represents the speech sounds of any language, in most cases ESL instruction needs to be focused on the IPA symbols that represent English phonemes only. Moreover, teaching the whole set of English phonemes can be unnecessary as well. Depending on learning objectives and contexts, sometimes it is enough to teach the symbols that stand for the phonemes that are part of high functional load phonemic contrasts (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 150). In other words, not all phonemes require equal attention. As Atkielski (2019) states, “In every language, some
phonemes are more important than others, because they occur more frequently in contrasting positions that serve to distinguish meaning.” For example, in English there are more words differentiated by the phonemic contrast between /ɪ/ and /i:/ (like in hit - heat) than those differentiated by the contrast between /d/ and /ð/ (like in dare – there). Hence, the contrast between /ɪ/ and /i:/ should be taught first (Atkielski, 2019, p. 6; Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 150). In addition to frequency, there is also an impact significance factor based on the functional load principle in teaching pronunciation. High functional load errors usually have a greater negative impact on the communication process than low functional load errors do (Munro & Derwing, 2006, p. 529; Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 150). For example, mistakes based on the contrast between /l/ and /r/ sounds (like in lice – rice) impede communication greater than mistakes based on /θ/ vs /s/ contrast (like in think – sink). Consequently, if students have difficulties distinguishing between /l/ and /r/ sounds, this problem should be given more attention while low functional load problems can be addressed when there is time.

Second, it is important to remember that in most situations teaching phonetic symbols to ESL students does not imply teaching any complicated terms or theory in phonetics or phonology. Usually students need to be shown how to produce a phoneme and recognize the symbol that stands for it, but they do not need to understand and remember terms such as fricative, plosive, etc. (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015, p. 295). For example, it is enough to demonstrate the puff of the air coming with pronunciation of the sound /p/ in a stressed position using a strip of paper placed in front of the mouth. However, usually it is unnecessary to teach or even use the words aspiration and plosive. In most cases it is enough to demonstrate the th sounds (/θ/ and /ð/ like in think and these) by putting the tip of the tongue between the upper and the lower teeth, without introducing the term interdental. The same approach can be applied to any term or concept.

Third, phonetic transcriptions can be narrow and broad. Narrow transcription reflects every phonological feature, whether it changes the meaning or not. This type of transcription is called phonetic and is usually used for a detailed speech analysis, for example, to show the difference between accents or demonstrate what allophones are. Broad transcription, in contrast, includes only
the symbols of phonological features that are important to convey and distinguish meaning in a particular language. This type of transcription is called phonemic and is used to demonstrate how a word or a phrase is pronounced without pointing out subtle differences that are not critical for meaning (Atkielski, 2019, p. 2). If teachers learn about phonetic alphabets as a part of a linguistic course, they are more likely to be introduced to the narrow type of transcription that can look overcomplicated. As a result, teachers may be discouraged, thinking that narrow transcription is what they are supposed to teach ESL students. However, in most situations, ESL students do not need to know narrow transcription at all. This is because most language materials and dictionaries use broad transcription, and phonemically correct pronunciation is all that is needed for intelligibility and clear communication (Heselwood, 2013, p. 255).

Another thing worth mentioning is that teaching phonetic alphabet symbols can imply two levels of outcome, namely (a) passive recognition of symbols and (b) being able to produce them (Arleo, 1993, p. 44). Usually, the latter is more difficult and takes more time to develop for an average student (Mompean, 2005, p. 2). However, very few learning objectives that involve phonetic symbols require the skill of producing phonetic symbols. For example, if teachers would like their students to take notes on pronunciation using phonetic symbols instead of regular alphabet letters, then it is necessary to teach students how to write at least some of the symbols that stand for the most problematic English phonemes. Otherwise, in most cases passive recognition is enough and there is no need to spend time and effort on teaching students to write symbols.

Also, it is necessary to introduce symbols at a pace that is comfortable for students. If all symbols are presented at once, it will cause an excessive learning load, and students will feel overwhelmed. It is much less stressful for students if sounds and symbols standing for them are taught, as Mompean (2005) suggests, “individually or in very small groups over a series of lessons rather than in a single lesson” (p. 2). One or two symbols at a time, devoting only several minutes of class time, usually do not cause much anxiety among students.

In addition, like learning any aspect of language, learning pronunciation is more effective if it is done on a regular basis rather than only occasionally (Mompean, 2005, p. 1). First, a regular
approach encourages students to encounter the material that needs to be mastered more often and makes the process of memorization more effective. Second, when pronunciation work is made part of a lesson systematically, it allows for shorter pronunciation activities and divides the learning load into smaller portions. In other words, a five-minute activity that takes place regularly is usually more effective than an hour activity that happens only sporadically.

Furthermore, the work involving phonetic symbols does not have to be an isolated activity focused on pronunciation only. As Mompean (2005) notes, “A good strategy is undoubtedly to integrate work on pronunciation features (and phonetic symbols to represent them) into lessons that focus on other language learning activities. This is known as “integrated pronunciation teaching” (p. 1). Thus, making phonetic symbols part of reading, listening, grammar or vocabulary activities may be very effective in terms of the use of class time. In addition, it encourages treating pronunciation as an integral part of communication instead of a separate phenomenon.

Finally, needless to say, fun activities can be really useful to reduce the stress and anxiety among students. Like learning any other skill or concept, learning phonetic symbols does not have to be boring. Mixing teacher explanations with games, competitions, practical assignments and other kinds of activities can make the process of learning not only enjoyable for ESL students but easier and less demanding as well (Arleo, 1993, p. 46).

In conclusion, teaching phonetic alphabet symbols can be very flexible and does not have to be stressful, neither for teachers nor students (Heselwood, 2013, p. 255). First, depending on learning objectives and contexts, teachers can choose the level of detail provided by their explanation, the type of transcription (phonetic or phonemic), the number of symbols to teach and learning outcomes to work on. In addition, teaching that is adjusted to students’ pace and done on a regular basis through short and fun activities integrated into practicing other language skills can help to make the process of learning phonetic symbols much less time-consuming and overwhelming. However, teacher training is necessary for language instructors to be able to apply these guidelines and know how to adjust the teaching process to their contexts and students’ needs (Mompean, 2005, p. 1).
Limitations and future research

The results of this study provided useful insights into attitudes of experienced ESL pronunciation teachers towards the use of phonetic alphabet symbols in teaching pronunciation. However, the study had some limitations that should be noted. First, the study was based on one type of data collection (an online survey) and was not supported by any other data collection approaches. To obtain more reliable data, a combination of data collection instruments is often advisable.

Second, the large number of the teachers who had had experience teaching pronunciation (compared to the number of those who had not) made it difficult to find statistically significant differences between the groups in their attitudes towards the use of phonetic symbols in teaching ESL pronunciation. In addition, the sample we used included mostly teachers with experience (and in many cases, expertise) in teaching pronunciation. Therefore, our results can be considered representative of experienced ESL pronunciation teachers but not of the general population of ESL teachers. Hence, in the future, depending on the research purpose, it would be helpful to survey ESL teachers both with and without pronunciation teaching experience.

In addition, although the time stamp of the survey helped to differentiate SUPRAS pronunciation experts’ responses from the responses provided by relatively less experienced ELC teachers, it was not a 100% reliable way to divide the groups. Consequently, depending on the research purpose, it is advisable to use more reliable methods to divide experts from non-experts to see if there is a difference between their opinions.

The results of the study showed that most of the participants find their students’ skill of checking out the pronunciation of words in dictionaries valuable, but very few of them indicated teaching it. The data of the current study allowed to create a couple of hypotheses to explain this situation (the outside circumstances [e.g., integrated skills or stand-alone pronunciation course, curriculum objectives, students’ needs] and teachers’ lack of knowledge how to teach phonetic symbols for this purpose effectively). However, future research needs to be conducted to check if the hypotheses are correct. Therefore, it would be helpful to include into the survey the items that ask
directly if participants teach their students to check the pronunciation of words in dictionaries and if no, why they are not doing that.

Also, in addition to ESL teachers’ opinions, it would be enlightening to find out ESL students’ opinions about the usefulness of phonetic symbols in learning ESL and whether or not they feel this notation helps them learn the sound system of English better. Besides, given that according to experienced ESL teachers’ opinion, enhancing independent study is one of the most important benefits of teaching phonetic alphabet symbols to students, empirical studies are needed to find out to what extent does teaching these symbols make a difference in students’ ability to actually determine the pronunciation of new English words.

Conclusion

The survey showed that experienced ESL pronunciation teachers acknowledge the benefits of using phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation and tend to have positive attitudes towards it. However, often ESL instructors are not equipped with effective strategies to overcome the challenges they can face while using the technique in their classes. As a result, even experienced pronunciation teachers may neglect to teach their students the skill of checking out the pronunciation of words in dictionaries independently even though they realize the usefulness of it. Finally, there is a need for ESL teacher training programs to instruct teachers how to teach phonetic symbols to ESL students effectively.
References


Americanist phonetic notation. (2020, September 22). In Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americanist_phonetic_notation


Appendix.
Teacher questionnaire

ESL Teachers' Attitudes Towards Teaching Pronunciation
You are invited to participate in a research project that examines teachers’ attitudes towards teaching pronunciation and some of the tools available to that end.

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Oxana Kodzirova, a MA TESOL student at Brigham Young University to determine your attitude towards using certain tools in teaching pronunciation to ESL students. You were invited to participate because you are an ESL teacher (or have such experience) who has worked with adult ESL students.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this research study, you will take a survey that will last approximately 10-15 minutes and include questions about your educational background, teaching experience and tools you use to teach pronunciation to ESL students.

Risks/Discomforts
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It is not expected that there will be any harm or discomfort as a result of your participation. However, if you wish to withdraw from the survey, you may do so at any time, and you do not need to give any reasons or explanations for doing so.

Benefits
There are no known benefits to you; however, your participation in this study may provide valuable insights about ESL teachers’ attitudes towards using certain tools in teaching pronunciation to ESL students which will be important in designing training programs for TESOL teachers.

Confidentiality
There will be no reference to your identification in reporting this research and you are free to withhold any identifying information that is asked in this survey.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this research.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Oxana Kodzirova at kseniarostov@gmail.com for further information.

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

Do you agree to participate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many years of formal education do you have?
- [ ] Less than High School
- [ ] High school graduate
- [ ] Some college
- [ ] 2 year degree
- [ ] 4 year degree
- [x] Professional degree
- [ ] Doctorate

What was your major or emphasis?
- [ ] TESOL
- [ ] World/Foreign Language Education
- [ ] Linguistics
- [ ] Other
  

In which country were you born?

What do you consider to be your native language(s)?

How many years have you been teaching English as a second language to adults?

Please indicate how you learned about the following linguistics topics. Choose all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Informal Study</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sounds (Phonetics, Phonology, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning (Morphology, Semantics, Pragmatics, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure (Syntax, Grammar, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the following phonetic alphabets, what can you currently do without review or study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very little to nothing</th>
<th>Can use it for my own language study</th>
<th>Can use it to teach students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Example: [distr/bju]/(e)n]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Google Phonetic Alphabet. Example: /distr byooSHan/</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEAP Example: /distr 'byooSHan/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Horizons /distr/byooShn/</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other, please specify</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever taught pronunciation to ESL adult students?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other, please specify

What methods do you typically use in teaching pronunciation? Choose all that apply.

- [ ] Minimal Pairs
- [X] Phonetic Alphabet Symbols Instruction
- [ ] Mirrors
- [ ] Drills (Listen & Repeat)
- [ ] Record and replay
- [ ] Articulation Demonstrations (Show diagrams of mouth)
- [ ] Other

How were you introduced to using the phonetic alphabet symbols for teaching pronunciation? Choose all that apply.

- [ ] One semester course entirely dedicated to pronunciation
- [ ] Part of Listening and Speaking course
- [ ] Part of General Teaching course
- [ ] Self study
- [ ] None
- [ ] Other, please specify
How confident are you in using the phonetic alphabet symbols that you know as a technique to teach students pronunciation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever taught your students to use phonetic alphabet symbols to learn how to pronounce words on their own outside of class?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify

---

Could you explain briefly how you use Phonetic Alphabet Symbols Instruction in teaching pronunciation?

---

When you use phonetic alphabets in class, do you teach the **whole alphabet or only selected symbols**?

- I teach the whole alphabet
- I teach selected symbols
- Other, please specify

Could you specify what symbols do you usually prefer to teach (for example, all vowels, th-sounds, shwa, the vowel in the word "cat", etc.)?

---

You didn’t indicate "Phonetic Alphabet Symbols Instruction" Could you explain why?

---
I think using phonetic alphabet symbols to teach pronunciation is a valuable use of class time.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

If you were given a pronunciation course and didn’t have an opportunity to do extra study or preparation, would you feel confident teaching your students how to use phonetic alphabet symbols (like IPA)?

- Not confident at all
- Slightly confident
- Somewhat confident
- Fairly confident
- Quite confident
- Completely confident

If you were given a pronunciation course and had the opportunity to do extra study and preparation, would you feel confident teaching your students how to use phonetic alphabet symbols (like IPA)?

- Not confident at all
- Slightly confident
- Somewhat confident
- Fairly confident
- Quite confident
- Completely confident

I would like to know more about teaching using phonetic alphabet symbols to my students.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
I think ESL students’ ability to look up a word and figure out its pronunciation with the help of a phonetic alphabet outside the classroom is a useful skill that is worth teaching.

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Somewhat agree
- [ ] Somewhat disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

What (if any) are the advantages of using/teaching phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL classroom?

What (if any) are the disadvantages of using/teaching phonetic alphabet symbols in ESL classroom?