

IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION OF ADULT ESL LEARNERS THROUGH READING ALOUD ASSESSMENTS

Siti Nurani¹; Amrina Rosyada²

^{1,2} English Education Department, Faculty of Language and Art, Indraprasta PGRI University
Jl. Nangka No. 58C Tanjung Barat (TB Simatupang), Jagakarsa, Jakarta Selatan 12530

¹nurani_city@yahoo.com; ²amrin4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Communication skill nowadays becomes a must that everyone should master. The agreement of such conceptual meaning in communication should meet the same perception among speakers. One of the tools to improve one's communication skill is by learning pronunciation through Reading Aloud for misperception emerged from mispronunciation can be avoided. This research aims at improving English pronunciation through reading aloud in the form of short texts. The research was carried out in Statistics Data Center (BPS) by employing an action research with two cycles of assessments. There were 20 IT engineers of Networking Operation Center with various background of knowledge as an object of the research. The data was collected by observation, note taking, and test which are designed and administered to identify the participants' core and frequency of English tasks and also to investigate participants' previous experiences with English. Findings show that there is an improvement on participants' pronunciation skill through Reading Aloud as it can be seen from the increase of a mean score on the second cycle with 77.75 that is considered as good predicate.

Keywords: English pronunciation, reading aloud technique, pronunciation skill

ABSTRAK

Kemampuan berkomunikasi saat ini menjadi suatu keharusan yang harus dikuasai oleh setiap orang. Persamaan persepsi diantara sesama penutur terhadap makna konseptual sangat diperlukan dalam berkomunikasi. Salah satu cara untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berkomunikasi adalah melalui pembelajaran pelafalan (pronunciation) dengan teknik membaca nyaring (reading aloud) agar kesalahpahaman makna yang ditimbulkan dari kesalahan pelafalan dapat dihindarkan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk meningkatkan kemampuan pelafalan bahasa Inggris dalam bentuk teks pendek. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian tindakan kelas dengan dua siklus yang dilakukan di Badan Pusat Statistik. Sebanyak 20 karyawan SubDit JKD yang berprofesi sebagai insinyur IT dengan berbagai latar belakang pengetahuan sebagai objek penelitian. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, catatan lapangan, dan tes yang dirancang dan diberikan untuk mengetahui kemampuan dasar dan frekuensi penggunaan bahasa Inggris partisipan serta untuk mengetahui pengalaman partisipan terhadap penggunaan bahasa Inggris sebelumnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan kemampuan partisipan dalam pembelajaran pelafalan melalui teknik membaca nyaring yang terlihat dari peningkatan nilai rata-rata pada siklus kedua yaitu sebesar 77.75 dengan predikat kategori bagus.

Kata kunci: pelafalan bahasa Inggris, teknik membaca nyaring, kemampuan pelafalan

INTRODUCTION

As an integrated information center corporation in Indonesia, Statistics Data Center (BPS) is expected to be able to offer clients a full range of services, particularly of Networking Operation Center to each unit of Data Center. In doing such services, the employees (i.e., IT engineers of Networking Operation Center) are required to use English as the medium of communication for communicating with their clients both from local and across cultures. Along with the fast development of technology and science, cultural and social life, the communication competence becomes one of the primary factors in achieving the perfection of language comprehension. Therefore, the target of communication among people could be reached without any obstacles. With the continuing demand of using English in surroundings, people's communication skill must be developed to ease them to communicate with each other.

One of the learning aspects that is significant to learn for increasing communication skill is pronunciation. Clear pronunciation gives speakers the power to be confident when expressing and indicating themselves in communicating with others (Zaigham, 2011), whereas mispronunciation will lead misperception among them. Hence, pronunciation is what speakers concern with as it comprises rules to utter words accurately (Harmer, 2001). The success of communication really depends on the speakers' fluency in pronouncing the words. In this case, the speakers must adhere to some standard of pronunciation in order to be understood by others.

Learning pronunciation of a second language possesses a problem that is different to a problem that speakers face when they learn their first language. There appears to be multiple factors contributing to the pronunciation attained by the second language learner, such as the age (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979); and also the length of residence in a place where the target language is spoken (Purcell & Suter, 1980). There will be some learners who may want to approach a native-like pronunciation as they want to deal on equal terms with native speakers in an English-speaking country. However, some studies claim that older people are not disadvantaged for the attainment of native-like pronunciation of the second language (Neufeld, 1978; Olson & Samuels, 1973; e.g. Neufeld, 1978; Olson & Samuels, 1973; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hole, 1977).

Similarly, (Scovel, 1988) pointed out that learners who start to learn second language later than, say, age 12, will never be able to "pass themselves off as native speakers" and will "end up easily identified as nonnative speakers of that language". Learners who start to learn a second language before the close of the critical period were assumed to be able to achieve native-like mastery, provided that they were continuously exposed to sufficient input from native speakers of that language (Lenneberg, 1967). However, (Klein, 1995) assumed that although the age factor may generally hold true but adults can ultimately attain good pronunciation by the interplay of three factors, that is, language processor, access, and propensity. Klein argued that there is no evidence of any drastic changes in adults' biological barrier which influenced the language

processor in native-like attainment. The access to second language can only be achieved if a learner has a high level propensity of acquiring a second language.

Since the participants in this research are adult ESL learners, who might be called as ultimate learners of pronunciation (age factor) hypothesized in a critical period, must meet problems in their pronunciation learning process. Compared to adults, younger learners would generally receive more and more varied input from native speakers and would be more highly motivated to acquire the second language at native-like level (Schuman, 1975). In other words, adults are assumed to receive only less adequate input and are considered as less motivated language learners as contrast to Klein's hypothesis. Due to some above factors that might interfere the process of learning, pronunciation lesson should be set as good as possible to ease ultimate learners receiving the materials. Various activities and assessments in the learning process have to fulfill the needs of participants' learning situation which involves subjective and process-oriented needs, consisting of the participants' language learning preference to do such activities that will be given in the learning process. Therefore, reading aloud technique might be the best alternative to overcome participants' needs in learning pronunciation. The benefits of reading aloud are numerous and one of them is increasing the motivation of students to read and to build their topical knowledge about a specific subject. By Reading Aloud employed in the pronunciation learning, participants are expected to be more active and interactive in engaging their real life communication.

No two individuals pronounce exactly alike. The differences arise from a variety of causes, such as the time in which they grew up, the area in which they now live, their early influences, social class, social surroundings, their level of education, and there are also individual peculiarities for which it is difficult or impossible to account. Even within the same groups of the same area and class, each individual has his or her own unique way of speaking. Pronunciation refers to the way in which a word or a language is usually spoken in which someone utters a word or a language. The fluency in pronouncing English utterances is the most important aspect in producing accurate meaning of the utterance so that it could be easily comprehended by a community. Pronouncing the utterances is really influenced and determined by the use of intonation and stressed word in a sentence correctly.

Various mastery levels of pronunciation portray the difference of one's competence and performance in communication. Having a good or a bad pronunciation really depends on one's effort to learn pronunciation. In the learning process, learners may face difficulty to cope the materials as they are imposed to the language they are not familiar with. As the late start learners of pronunciation, adult ESL learners must find pronunciation learning as such frustrating lesson.

One of the difficulties in learning pronunciation is when learners pronounce English words. As a result, making errors in pronouncing English as foreign language is considered as a common and natural phenomenon in the early stage of foreign language learning process. Goodwin (2001) affirmed that in teaching pronunciation, there is a set of goals of instructions examined, namely: 1) to enable

our learners to understand and be understood, 2) to build their confidence in entering communicative situations, and 3) to enable them to monitor their speech based on input from the environment. To accomplish these goals, he describes the tools we need to teach pronunciation in a systematic and principled way. Therefore teachers should determine the best technique to cope with the problems that learners face. By pointing those problems, some scholars have demonstrated that reading aloud is said to be an effective way to ease learners in comprehending both of written and spoken contexts in teaching pronunciation (i.e. Alshumaimeri, 2011; Huang, 2010; Tost, 2013).

By applying Reading Aloud in classroom context, learners will experience more joyful learning circumstance as it offers numerous benefits as supported by (Jacobs & Hannah, 2004) who classified them into two groups, that is “benefits of reading aloud to students who are learning to read and benefits of ‘reading aloud to students at any level of reading proficiency’”. The former states that reading aloud helps students see the link between print and language, i.e., those black marks on the page represent sounds and words, and students see the direction in which words and letters flow in the language of the book being read to them. Teachers demonstrate how to hold a book, to open a book, and to turn the pages. Students build their memories as they seek to recall earlier parts of a book and previously read books. Hearing books read to them inspires students to want to learn to read. The latter affirms that students can learn new language items, such as vocabulary and grammar, and their understanding of previously learned language is deepened and broadened by new and repeated encounters. Students’ listening skills increase. A bond of shared experience is built between the reader and the listener. Reading aloud can be used to launch a discussion about life, topics currently being studied, and language. Students build their knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. Teachers share their enthusiasm for reading, encouraging students to read the same book, books by the same author or of the same type, or any sort of reading matter on their own.

Since reading loud technique releases numerous benefits, many teachers conduct the teaching strategy by modeling some assessments in the teaching and learning process, specifically in the process of teaching pronunciation by using the reading aloud technique. There are some steps in investigating several assessments in the reading aloud technique, namely: 1) text selection, 2) previewed and practiced, 3) clear purpose established, 4) fluent reading modeled, 5) animation and expression, 6) discussing the text, and 7) independent reading and writing (Fisher et al, 2004). In the text selection, teachers choose the most appropriate reading texts that will be read in front of learners based on their needs. In this case, teachers should consistently choose the text that meets its requirement in improving learners’ English competence. Previewed and practiced is a step for teachers reading the text fluently by doing the pause in each section of theme. In this step, learners are welcomed to ask for questions of every problem in reading they face. Further assessment, which is known as clear purpose established, is held before learners starting to read texts by using reading aloud technique. Here, teachers determine general objectives

by framing the target of reading skill achievement that is integrated with other skills (i.e., speaking, reading, writing, listening, vocabulary and grammar). Also, in the step of fluent reading modeled, teachers must be as a fluent model in reading the text. This is conducted to overcome learners’ mispronunciation. The most important phase where all learners are involved into their own text is called as animation and expression phase (Fisher et. al., 2004) . In this phase, teachers are expected to read the texts in a full of expression by using gesture, intonation, and body movement. Therefore, learners are totally engaged in the situation of learning. Another stage, discussing the text, is a step when both teacher and learners discussing the text to get the appropriate concept of meaning and to link the function of text to learners’ daily life. This can be done either before reading, during the process of reading or even after the process of reading. The last step is independent reading and writing. Here, teachers evaluate learners’ reading competence on how far they comprehend their reading texts. Various exercises and brief comment on journal will be beneficial for learners to enhance their level of reading competence.

METHOD

This research basically aims in improving English pronunciation through reading aloud assessments. The research was carried out in Statistics Data Center (BPS), engaging 20 IT engineers of Networking Operation Center with various background of knowledge as an object of the research. This research is a Practical Action Research with two cycles of assessments, focused on learners’ pronunciation improvement (Creswell, 2012). The data was collected through interviews, observation, and documents to identify the participants’ core and frequency of English tasks and also to investigate participants’ previous experiences with English (Creswell, 2012).

As stated by (Fisher et al., 2004), each of cycle in the process of reading aloud is conducted by various assessments, namely: text selection, previewed and practiced, clear purpose established, fluent reading modeled, animation and expression, discussing the text, and independent reading and writing. The research design in this Practical Action Research is cycling the process of reading aloud as (Mills, 2011) described that action research as ‘dialectic action research spiral’. This model provides four-step guide which is drawn as follows:

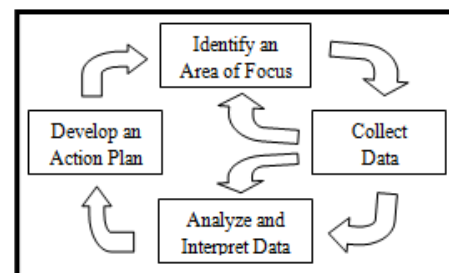


Figure 1 Dialectic Action Research Spiral
Source: (Mills, 2011:19)

The identifying step is a step related to defining the area, doing the self-reflection and description, reviewing the literature, and writing an action research plan to guide

the research. Collecting is an action of gathering multiple sources of data by using the interviews, observation, and documents. The analyzing and Interpreting step are conducted by identifying themes, coding the data, asking the key questions, doing an organizational reviews, connecting findings to personal experiences, and contextualizing the findings in literature and theory. The final step, developing an action plan, includes a summary of findings, recommended actions, and the identification of individuals responsible to carry out the action. This model includes four stages where the cycles back and forth between the data collection and identifying stage; and data collection and analyzing and interpretation stage (Creswell, 2012).

In this present research, the writers who also acted as the researchers, conduct two cycles of reading aloud assessments of which in each cycle carried out various assessments. Those are text selection, previewed and practiced, clear purpose established, fluent reading modeled, animation and expression, discussing the text, and independent reading as well as writing. By doing such assessments, it is expected that problems in learning pronunciation faced by adult ESL learners will be solved. In this case, learners are facilitated with various interesting learning media to succeed the teaching-learning process. It is hoped that learners experience better learning circumstance in learning pronunciation.

At the first cycle, numerous interactive materials were prepared in the identifying stage. In the text selection, the writers observed that learners find their job description of the text is the best text given. Here, the appropriate text is determined to meet their need suited to their scopes of work. The writers then previewed and practiced the text by giving the concept of the classification of segmental phonemes, i.e., classification of vowels and consonants by giving list of those categories. In the phase of clear purpose established, the writers then gave participants exercises of some lists of short vowel and consonant words in the form of short text. After each participant practiced the text given, the writers were acting as the fluent reading models to show the participants how to read the text well. The aspects of animation and expression should also be involved in the process of reading the text. This is a task for writers to take supra-segmental phonemes into the learning process, such as the use of gestures, intonation, stressed patterns in the sentences of the text.

Both in the identifying and collecting phase, note taking is held in the two last activities of reading aloud assessments, that is, the stage of discussing the text as well as independent reading and writing. In these activities, learners were assessed by giving them some examples of words contained segmental phonemes in a short text to be pronounced. Each learner should come to the front of the class to read aloud the text. The activity is conducted by recording learners' voice during the process of reading aloud. This is done to identify mispronunciation made by learners in detail as the writers evaluate it in order to score their pronunciation level. In this stage, learners are welcomed to ask for and to comment on their pronunciation problems. In the analyze and interpret phase, the writers analyzed on the assessments that had been done and decided to conduct another cycle as they found that the level of learners' pronunciation mastery was not yet considered as satisfactory.

Having a better preparation in selecting the text is relied on the identifying phase of the second cycle. Here, the text is chosen and put the phonetic transcriptions of each segmental phoneme into the text to make it easier to

read. More practical overview of the text's features is given in the previewed and practiced stage. This is employed to deprive learners' boredom to the materials. The phase of clear purpose established, released on giving learners more interactive exercise with a simpler short text by also examining various role plays in learners' performance. Accordingly, the writers as the reading models for learners provide directly practicing the aspects of animation and expression, either before, during, or after the process of reading. It is a step where the writers had to elaborate more on the supra-segmental aspects of the materials.

The collecting data stage in the second cycle should also portray a better performance of learners' pronunciation. For this time, every single of mispronunciation was noted. Here, learners were tested twice as they have another chance to identify their mispronunciation. In accordance, learners were given a more open opportunity to improve their ability on pronouncing the words. The recording session is set to be more comfortable as they have space to prepare themselves to read aloud the text better than before. In the observing stage, report is made into journals regarding learners' improvement in learning pronunciation by categorizing the aspects of learning in detail. Then, scores were also identified together with the analysis of the progress. As for the feedback, in the developing an action plan stage, the writers mapped the learners' need by interviewing learners about what aspect of learning that should be included and what should be leaved out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With a very perusal investigation at each cycle, the writers found that there was an increase of learners' pronunciation performance in the second cycle. Learners' mean score was then also increasing. The results show that in the second cycle, each learner had a progress in pronouncing the words and sentences in a short text clearly both of pronouncing vowels and consonants. The assessments of pronouncing segmental phonemes are scored to learners' mean score of clear pronunciation of vowels (i.e., front, central, and back vowels) and consonants (i.e., viewed from the place of articulation and manner of articulation). The mean score will be averaged in each cycle that can be seen from the table below:

Table 1 Learners' Mean Score of Pronouncing Segmental Phonemes in Each Cycle

Learner	Vowels		Consonants	
	1 st cycle	2 nd cycle	1 st cycle	2 nd cycle
1	62	78	60	78
2	58	72	56	78
3	57	73	56	77
4	61	78	61	78
5	62	77	61	78
6	62	76	60	78
7	65	81	60	80
8	62	78	60	77
9	62	78	61	76
10	62	77	60	78
11	65	83	62	80
12	61	78	61	80
13	61	77	61	77
14	63	78	60	80
15	65	77	62	76
16	62	78	60	76
17	65	82	60	80
18	62	79	60	78
19	62	78	61	78
20	61	77	58	77
Mean	62	77.75	60	78

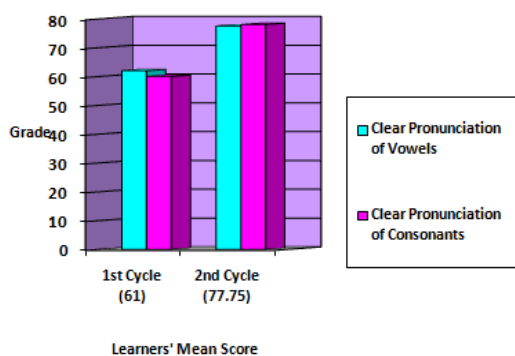


Figure 2 Learners' Mean Score of Clear Pronunciation in Each Cycle

As the chart displayed, there is an improvement of learners' pronunciation test from one cycle to the second one. In the first cycle, learner's mean score releases on 61 point as the result, of which it was categorized as poor score. This point showed that the students' competence in pronunciation was low. At the first time, it was expected that every learner could apply reading aloud in their pronunciation learning smoothly. In fact, learners still got problems in pronouncing some vowel sounds especially in pronouncing back vowel /ʊ/ such as in 'good', 'could', 'would', 'input', 'book', 'pull', etc.; front vowels /a/ as in the words 'five', 'light', etc.; and /æ/, e.g., 'back', 'bag', 'cash', 'can', 'cabinet', 'carry', etc; and some consonant sounds particularly of fricative sounds of /θ/, for instance 'month', 'through', etc.; and /ð/ as in the words 'other', 'there', 'that', and also affricate sounds of /tʃ/ like in the expressions 'cheap', 'question' 'chair', 'chain', etc.; and /dʒ/ such as in 'wage', 'June', etc. (table 1). Those parts of sounds seem to be difficult for learners to pronounce. This might happen as there is an influence of mother tongue toward the target language. In accordance, learners' confidence was also still at a low level as they perform their first experience.

In the second cycle, the mean score was increased by 77.75 point, of which it indicated a progress from previous cycle. The result showed that learners made more progress both of their score as well as of their confidence on performance. Problems on pronouncing each segment of speech, particularly for the difficult parts of vowel and consonant sounds that are mentioned above were also decreased. In this second cycle, learners had more effort to lead their pronunciation into a better level of mastery. This was influenced by doing more practice among learners themselves. Also, with more interactive media of learning, learners might feel comfortable to receive the lesson materials well. The mean score was categorized as good score.

The Practical Action Research had been conducted in two cycles that comprised of six meetings. In each cycle, there were four stages investigated, namely: identifying an area of focus, collecting the data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and developing the action plan. Each cycle was then accomplished by using reading aloud assessments to look over learners' need in their learning circumstance. The writers who also acted as the researchers did the analysis by examining the procedures of observing, note taking, and testing. Observation and

note taking were carried out to record the process of learning in the classroom, whereas the test was conducted to measure and score the learners' pronunciation mastery.

At the first cycle, the writers found that many learners still got difficulty coping their learning in each level of assessment. Most of learners still had lack of confidence to experience the activities as they did not have such the thing before. As the result, every learning assessment of each cycle did not run smoothly. Learners in this cycle were as passive for giving only little contribution to the learning process. Here, mispronunciation made by almost 90 percents of learners was massively found as it presented in their mean score of segmental phonemes (table 1). The mean score of each learner was also still at the poor level. Hence, better teaching and learning process circumstance were brought by examining more numerous interactive things into the classroom.

A more excited situation of learning was created in the second cycle. To take the cycle played better than former cycle, writers then built more practical assessments to ease learners achieve their goal of learning. Learners began to be very enthusiastic in learning. This can be seen from their progress to have their confidence both on written and spoken assessments. The mean score had also been increased by the time they were given various interactive media of learning. In this second cycle, learners became active and mispronunciation made by them was also gradually derived. All learners were totally getting involved in their learning process as they led their pronunciation to be as fluent as native like pronunciation.

The technique of reading aloud made learners have a joyful experience of learning pronunciation as it offers many advantages for creating a better circumstance of teaching and learning process. As reading aloud integrates all skills of language competence and performance, then learners will have a complete thought for understanding the concept of learning pronunciation by delivering the message of its meaning thoroughly. Clear pronunciation made by learners will lead them to meaningful communication. By pronouncing the words correctly, communicative requirements must be reached.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the use of reading aloud assessments in pronunciation lesson is said to be successful in improving English pronunciation of adult ESL learners. This can be seen from the increase of learners' mean score of their clear pronunciation performance in the second cycle, of which 61 point at the first cycle and 77.75 point at the second cycle. Moreover, reading aloud is also considered to be beneficial to increase learners' motivation in learning pronunciation. This can be seen from their enthusiasm of learning pronunciation as they view the circumstance of learning as their experience new environment. In addition, the interaction among learners is developed significantly as they feel free to be involved on the communication among them. In every step of the lesson, the writers give an enormous opportunity to the learners to give their aspiration for creating a better circumstance of teaching and learning process.

The results of the study are expected to be as a contribution to the development of language education

particularly of the pronunciation skill improvement. The results are also expected to give an important insight and valuable information for educational practitioners in investigating the theoretical underpinnings of second language acquisition, especially of the attainment native-like pronunciation. This present research deals with the identification of pronunciation skill improvement by examining reading aloud assessments as its main focus. To see more comprehensible input to the research, such approaches might be also linked to several other perspectives of disciplines, such as ESP and corpus-based approach to foster educational practitioners in increasing the innovation in teaching and learning process mainly of pronunciation lesson in the classroom context.

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