

Improving EFL Students' English Pronunciation by Using the Explicit Teaching Approach

Parlindungan Pardede

parlpard2010@gmail.com

*English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia*

Abstract

Due to several reasons, pronunciation instruction had often been neglected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Consequently, many EFL learners always find it difficult to speak confidently because of their poor pronunciation. This study is a three-cycled action research aimed at enhancing EFL students' pronunciation by using the explicit teaching approach. The participants were 21 students majoring in English Education at Universitas Kristen Indonesia who attended Integrated Skills IV class in the even semester of 2015/2016 Academic Year. The participants were provided with special practices on pronunciation, including watching video or listening to English expressions containing elements of English pronunciation difficult to them, drillings the elements, recording and transcribing their utterances, and comparing the transcriptions with those of native speakers'. Data were collected through tests and questionnaires. The results revealed that the explicit teaching approach enhanced the participants' English pronunciation skills, as shown by the increase of their average scores in the four tests administered during the actions implementation. The survey results revealed that for the participants the approach was interesting, helped pronunciation development, and increased self-confidence in English speaking.

Keywords: *action research, pronunciation, explicit teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Good pronunciation skills are a key element to one's ability to speak in every language. Intelligible speech necessitates accurate production of many factors, e.g., phonemes, stress, linking, rhythm, and intonation. Burnkart (1988) emphasized that, in addition to grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation constitutes the mechanical elements of speaking skill. Thus, to speak effectively, the ability to pronounce accurately is a must. Without appropriate pronunciation, one's grammatical rules mastery and rich vocabulary possession does not guarantee that he is able to speak effectively. Fraser (2000, p. 7) argued that with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite his errors in other speaking subskills (vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics); with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas. Thornbury (2006, p. 185) accentuated, "faulty pronunciation is one of the most common causes of misunderstanding".

Informal observations conducted by the present author in his Integrated Skills IV class revealed that pronunciation is a major impediment to communication for many students of the English Education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia. Many of them tended to ignore many aspects of pronunciation, including sounds, intonation,

pausing, linking and rhythm while speaking. For instances, some of them did not discriminate the pronunciation of *thanks* and *tanks*; *she* and *see* or *sea*. They also did not use different intonation for *Can you see Johan?* and *Can you see, Johan?* Their pronunciation inaccuracy often caused their utterances unintelligible.

Producing intelligible utterances seemed to be a prevalent problem among many freshmen and sophomores in this department. Pardede's (2006) study revealed that the freshmen of the same department encountered problems to produce English fricatives. The errors the subjects committed while pronouncing /θ/ was 89.8%; /ʒ/, 89.7%; /ʃ/, 76.2%; /ð/, 72.5%; and /z/, 55%. Such pronunciation inaccuracies could certainly cause misunderstanding in real communication.

The discussion with the students attending Integrated Skills IV in the odd semester of 2015/2016 academic year indicated that the English Phonology class, which covered the concepts of how sounds are produced and what articulators and point of articulations are employed in producing certain sounds, they had passed did not affect their pronunciation skills. The class had probably focused more on the sounds production theories and did not provide a proper opportunity to the sounds producing practice. The discussion also indicated that the emphasis on language functions and communicative competencies in the speaking activities in previous Integrated Skills classes caused pronunciation skills practice neglected.

To overcome the problem, a classroom action research using the explicit instruction in which the segmental and suprasegmental elements of the target language are taught explicitly was planned. This approach was selected due to two reasons: (1) the instruction conducted by treating pronunciation incidentally as an integrated part of the speaking activities did not facilitate the students to master English pronunciation well; and (2) many current English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) studies of pronunciation teaching have confirmed the effectiveness of the explicit instruction (e.g. Silveira (2002); Couper (2006); Saito, 2007; Kissling, 2013; and Sturm, 2013). Venkatagiri and Levis (2007) posited that explicit instruction can help learners develop 'phonological awareness' (i.e. conscious knowledge of segmental and suprasegmentals), which might play a key role in the target language speech intelligibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation Instruction Role in Language Teaching

Pronunciation instruction has long been so ignored in second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) teaching field that in the last decade of the 20th century. Gilbert (1994, p. 38) described it as "something of an orphan in English programs around the world" and, sixteen years later, she stated that "pronunciation continues to be the EFL/ESL orphan" (Gilbert, 2010, p. 1). Its prolonged negligence even drove researchers to regard pronunciation instruction as suffering from the "Cinderella Syndrome—kept behind doors and out of sight" (Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1996, p. 323) because it is the component of the SL/FL mostly excluded from all teaching programs.

However, pronunciation instruction has been growing in importance in the communicative-oriented EFL classroom due to the awareness that the most sensible, justifiable and pressing objective of pronunciation teaching is not to acquire native-like or 'perfect' pronunciation but to produce a comprehensible and an intelligible speech (Gilakjani, 2012), in which intelligibility refers to "the extent to which a listener actually understands an utterance", and comprehensibility is "a listener's perception of

how difficult it is to understand an utterance” (Derwing & Munro, 2005, p. 385). Since these new goals are reasonable they could avoid the frustration experienced by many learners in trials to acquire a ‘perfect’ pronunciation, especially.

Pronunciation Teaching Approaches and Techniques

The essential role of pronunciation to achieve successful communication has been recognized. However, the literature indicates various views concerning how pronunciation is taught in the classroom. The amount of time and effort provided to it are generally dependent on the individual teacher. Thus, it may or may not form part of regular classroom activities or student self-study” (Macdonald, 2003, p. 1). Pronunciation instruction tends to be avoided due to several factors: teachers often feel that they are inadequately prepared to teach it; pronunciation instruction is not appropriately emphasized in curricula, and suitable materials for teaching pronunciation are often unavailable (Fraser, 2000; Macdonald, 2003).

The approaches to pronunciation teaching are usually discussed by contrasting the 'bottom-up' vs the 'top-down' approach. The 'bottom-up' approach begins with the articulation of individual sounds or phonemes and works up towards stress, rhythm, tone, and intonation, whereas the 'top-down approach' starts with patterns of intonation and brings separate sounds or phonemes into sharper focus as and when required. According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) the former rests on the idea that if the segmentals are taught first, the suprasegmentals will subsequently be acquired without the need of formal instruction, whereas the latter is based on the assumption that once the suprasegmentals features are in place, the necessary segmental discriminations will follow accordingly. The bottom-up approach and the top-down approach respectively correspond to the traditional approach and the research-based approach proposed by Scarcella and Oxford (1994). While the traditional approach concerns with isolated sounds and native-like pronunciation, the research-based approach deals with suprasegmental features and targets at communication.

The findings and ideas of prominent pronunciation researchers (e.g. Fraser, 1999; Thompson, Taylor & Gray, 2001; Cook, 2008) provide several helpful techniques and activities teachers and learners can use. The first is using the 44 phonetic symbols which are a totally reliable guide to acquiring pronunciation because each symbol represents one English sound consistently. Second, utilizing known sounds which enables a learner to compare the sounds of the target language with those of his/her mother tongue. The third is the explanation technique conducted by describing how to produce sounds or use pronunciation patterns appropriately. Fourth, using communication activities which could be designed in the form of communicative tasks, such as dialogues or mini-conversations. Fifth, employing written versions of oral presentations use, in which learners are given strategies for analyzing the written versions of their oral presentations. Sixth, modeling and individual correction technique, in which the teacher reports the results of analyses of learner speech sample individually. Seventh, incorporation of new elements technique by which the instructor add novel pronunciation elements, such as sounds, stress placement, tones to the old ones.

The eighth is tutorial sessions and self-study technique, conducted by doing a diagnostic analysis of each learner's spoken English through the tutorial sessions, and followed by an individualized program designed for each learner. The ninth is recording of learners' speech and contrast with native model. Tenth, using computer-assisted language learning (CALL), an important tool when attempting to help the learner become

more autonomous by allowing him/her to hear his/her own errors and mistakes and see both segmental and suprasegmental graphic representations. Eleventh, using imitation of teachers or recorded models of sounds. Twelfth, self-monitoring (the conscious action of listening to one's own speech in order to find out errors and mistakes) and self-correction (the process of fixing one's errors and mistakes after they have occurred by repeating the word or phrase correctly). Finally, reading aloud, which is conducted by giving the learner a piece of spoken text to read out loudly and the teacher identifies the errors and mistakes made by the learner and then gives feedback to help him improve his/her EFL pronunciation.

These classroom techniques/activities are essentially not comprehensive. But they are substantially advantageous when used on the basis of feasibility and suitability in a particular environment having particular learners.

Pronunciation Explicit Instruction Approaches

Since the objective of pronunciation instruction is to enable the learners to produce a comprehensible and an intelligible speech, the learners should first be aware of the pronunciation elements they are going to produce. Schmidt (2001) hypothesized that awareness, or noticing, is essential for learners' acquisition because to make the input to become intake, learners need to notice the target linguistic feature first.

Current studies indicated that the best ways to help learners aware of an SL/FL pronunciation features are by explicitly teaching them the linguistic forms. Couper's (2006) study in New Zealand revealed that pronunciation explicit teaching helped Asian immigrant students notice the gap in their pronunciation and, consequently, improved their English pronunciation. Saito's (2007) research on the explicit teaching use of English vowels /æ/ and /a/ by means of *PRAAT* software to Japanese learners showed that students instructed explicitly on the target sounds showed great improvement in their pronunciation, whereas the students receiving implicit instruction only improved slightly. Additionally, Sliveira's (2002) experiment indicated that explicit pronunciation teaching is an effective means of solving the erroneous pronunciation of word-final consonants encountered by beginner Brazilian learners of English. Derwing and Munro (2005, p. 388) declared, "Just as students learning certain grammar points benefit from being explicitly instructed to notice the difference between their productions and those of L1 speakers, so students learning SL/FL pronunciation benefit from being explicitly taught phonological form to help them notice the difference".

The problems addressed of this study were stated as follow. (1) Can the explicit teaching approach increase the students' pronunciation skills? (2) What is the student attitude to the use of explicit teaching approach in their English pronunciation practice? This study was hopefully beneficial to (a) improve the pronunciation skills of the students participated in this study, (b) motivate them to learn English and (c) make English' pronunciation learning more interesting and challenging.

METHOD

This study is an action research aimed at enhancing the participants' English pronunciation skills by using the explicit teaching approach.

Research Settings and Participants

The participants were 21 students majoring in English Education at Universities Kristen Indonesia. The actions were conducted as an additional learning activity in Integrated

Skills IV class. The actions were implemented in the last 15-20 minutes of the class held twice a week from September 2015 to January 2016.

Actions Procedure

In this study, explicit pronunciation instruction was employed to correct English pronunciation elements which turned out to be erroneously uttered by the participants in the pretest (previously administered 2 weeks before Cycle I started). The erroneous elements were grouped into four pronunciation aspects: sounds, consonant clusters, stress, pausing, linking, prominence/non-prominence, and intonation. Details of the sounds and consonant clusters were presented in the actions implementation report in the finding section.

This study was conducted in three cycles, and each cycle was divided into four stages, namely: (1) planning, (2) actions, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. The details of each cycle were presented in the finding section. Overall, the action research was conducted in 23 sessions (1 session for administering the pretest, 19 sessions for the actions implementation, and 3 sessions for administering 3 posttests).

Instruments

Two types of instruments were employed to collect the data, i.e. four tests and two questionnaires. The first test (the pretest), administered two weeks before the action research began, was conducted by recording the students' utterance while they were reading a passage taken from Hewing (2007, p. 114). The recorded utterances were then transcribed into phonetic transcriptions. After that, each student's phonetic transcription was compared to the phonetic transcription of a native speaker's utterance of the same passage provided in MP3 format sound in the accompanying CD of Hewings' (2007) book. To make the process of transcribing the text into a phonetics transcription easier, Phonetizer (2014), a software for transcribing English text to IPA notation, was utilized. Since the results provided by the software were merely transcription of the segmental features, to make the transcription complete, the suprasegmental symbols (stress, pausing, linking, prominence/non-prominence and intonation) were added while listening to the utterances recorded in the CD.

Each student's score was rated by the researcher and the collaborator observer by counting the percentage of his/her pronunciation discrepancy with the native speaker's. Besides to assess the students' initial pronunciation performance, the pre-test also served to identify the problematic pronunciation elements to the students. The other three tests, (posttest 1, posttest 2, and posttest 3) were administered at the end of each corresponding cycle to assess the students' progress. The procedure and assessment system of these tests were identical with the ones in administering the pretest. The passages used in the three tests were also taken from Hewings (2007).

The first questionnaire (Pre-Action Questionnaire), consisting of eight statements to respond by choosing one of the four options arranged in 4 Linkert's scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), was administered to gauge the information concerning the students' initial perception of pronunciation. The second questionnaire (Post Action Questionnaire), consisting of eight questions, was distributed to the students to gauge their perception of the implementation of the action research and its effect on their pronunciation skills.

During the action research implementation, an observation sheet was also employed. However, it was not designed to collect data to answer the research questions.

It was used by the collaborator to monitor the process of the actions. The results of the observation were used as feedback in the reflection stage for planning better implementation in the next sessions or stage.

Data Analysis Technique

The quantitative data obtained from the tests were analyzed using descriptive statistical operation in the form of table and graphs. The data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive analysis. It was employed to investigate changes in the participants' attitudes.

Success Indicator

The success indicator in this action research was that at the end of the study the class achieved a mean score of ≥ 75 . This indicator determination was based on the assumption that by achieving it, the subjects must have been able to pronounce 75% of the English pronunciation elements accurately, and if they, after the study ended, proceed practicing pronunciation in the same way, their pronunciation intelligibility would become better and better.

FINDING

Initial Condition of the Participants

Before joining the action research, the participants' English pronunciation was strongly impeded by Indonesian sound system. In addition to their inaccuracy in using certain specific sounds, such as /æ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /θ/, and they also found it difficult to use clusters, like /-sps, -kst, -lpt, -mpts, -mpst, -ksts/. Moreover, they also did not apply linking and pausing. In addition, most of them failed to place stresses on the correct syllable. All of these caused their utterances relatively unintelligible.

Table 1:
The Range of the Participants' Pretest Score

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	0	0	Very Good	54.4
2	70-74.9	2	9.6	Good	
3	50-69.9	12	57.1	Fair	
4	≤ 49.9	7	33.3	Poor	
Total		21	100%		

The participants' poor pronunciation skills were obviously shown by the results of the pretest conducted two weeks before the actions implementation. As shown by Table 2, none of them got very good score categories. Only 9.6% got a good category, more than a half (57.1%) got fair category and, 33.3% got a poor category. This is supported by the fact the mean score they achieved in the pre-test, 54.4.

The data obtained from the Pre Action Questionnaire support this pronunciation skills inappropriateness. As shown in Table 3, the majority (71.4%) of them strongly disagreed and disagreed that their pronunciation was good. The majority (71.4%) also agreed and strongly agreed that their initial pronunciation made their utterances unintelligible.

Table 2:
Participants' Initial Perception of Pronunciation

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Pronunciation enhancement is important	0	0	0	0	9	42,9	12	57,1
2	My pronunciation is good	8	38,1	7	33,3	4	19	2	9,5
3	My pronunciation makes my utterances unintelligible	2	9,5	4	19,0	7	33,3	8	38,1
4	Pronunciation is the weakest aspect of my English	4	19	6	28,6	6	28,6	5	23,8
5	English pronunciation is very difficult to master	2	9,5	4	19,0	7	33,3	8	38,1
6	Native speakers' utterances are often difficult to understand	4	19	5	23,8	6	28,6	6	28,6
7	Feel reluctant to speak English due to poor pronunciation	3	14,3	5	23,8	7	33,3	6	28,6
8	I will do my best if I have an opportunity to improve my pronunciation.	0	0	2	9,5	8	38,1	11	52,4

Report of the Actions Implementation

Cycle I

Cycle I focused to improve the participants' ability to correctly pronounce some English sounds which had been identified problematic to them. To achieve the aim, seven sessions were planned. In each session, the participants did five activities. First, they watched Jennifer's (2010) video to listen to the sound and see how the organs of speech were employed to produce it. Second, everyone practiced the sound several times in isolation, then in a word, and finally in a sentence context. Third, the video was replayed two times and the students practiced the sound in groups. Fourth, every participant recorded, transcribed, and analyzed his/her own utterances. Fifth, two to three students were randomly selected to produce the sound in front of the class and other students were endorsed to review each of the performances. To observe the activities in each session, a colleague of the researcher was requested to fill in the observation sheet in order to check whether all of the planned activities were well implemented or not.

Table 3:
The Range of the Participants' Posttest I Score

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	1	4,8	Very Good	62.8
2	70-74.9	5	23.7	Good	
3	50-69.9	14	66.7	Fair	
4	≤ 49.9	1	4.8	Poor	
Total		21	100%		

The cycle was ended by administering the posttest intended to assess the participants' pronunciation progress. As shown by Table 4, the posttest scores of Cycle I indicated that the activities in this cycle managed to improve (although not quite significant) the students' pronunciation skills. If in the pretest none of the participants got "very good" score category and 90.4% got "fair" and "poor" score category, in the

Posttest I 4.76% managed to get “very good” score category, and those who got “fair” and “poor” score category had decreased to 71.5%.

The most important point of the reflection stage of Cycle I was the observer’s suggestion for providing the students with the materials used in the action research so that they could practice alone or in group outside of the class. Thus, in the first session of Cycle II, the materials to be used would be distributed to each participant.

Cycle II

Cycle II was designed to improve the subjects’ skills to correctly use eleven consonant clusters /-sps, -kst, -lpt, -mpts, -mpst, -ksts, spr-, spl-, -lpt, [r-, hj-/ and stress. Seven sessions were planned to let the subjects discuss and practice Unit 7-20 of Hewings’ (2007, pp. 20-47). One session was planned to practice two units. As suggested by the observer, students were facilitated to practice the materials alone or in group outside of the class.

The action stage of this cycle began by playing the related MP3 format expressions in the accompanying CD to the participants who listened without looking at the texts. Next, the researcher replayed the related expressions while the participants listened and looked at the texts. Then, the participants individually practiced to produce the expressions. Next, the participants recorded their own utterances and, individually or in group, they transcribed and analyzed their own utterances. Finally, two to three participants were randomly selected to produce the sound in front of the class and other students are endorsed to review each of the performances.

Just like in the first cycle, the observation stage of the second cycle was conducted by a colleague who filled in the provided observation sheets to check whether all the planned activities were carried out or not.

Table 4:
The Range of the Participants’ Posttest 2 Score

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	10	47.6	Very Good	70.7
2	70-74.9	4	19.1	Good	
3	50-69.9	7	33.3	Fair	
4	≤ 49.9	0	0	Poor	
Total		21	100%		

This cycle was ended by administering the posttest intended to assess the participants’ progress. The posttest scores of Cycle II presented in Table 4 indicated that the activities in this cycle managed to contribute much higher improvement in the participants’ pronunciation skills than the improvement in Cycle I. If in Posttest 1 only 4.76% of the participants got “very good” score category, in Posttest II almost a half (47.6%) of them managed to get “very good” score category. In Posttest 1, more than a half (66.7%) still got “fair” category, but in Posttest II there remained 33.3% who got this category.

The result of the reflection of Cycle II provided no significant point to take for improving the process in the next cycle. The observer stated that the activities in Cycle II had run quite well. The only thing necessary to do for improving the process in Cycle III was to motivate the participants to keep on practicing outside of the classroom.

Cycle III

Cycle III was designed to improve the students' skills to correctly use pausing, linking (breaking speech into units), prominence/non-prominence and intonation. Six sessions were planned to let the subjects discuss and practice 9 units (26, 32-41) of Hewings' (2007, pp. 58-59; and 70-89). Each session was designed to practice two units.

The action stage of this cycle began by playing the related MP3 format expressions in the accompanying CD to the participants who listened without looking at the texts. Next, the researcher replayed the related expressions while the subjects listened and looked at the texts. Then, the participants individually practiced to produce the expressions. After that, the participants recorded their own utterances, transcribed and analyzed them.

Since all participants also had the copies of texts and CDs, they were also suggested to practice alone or in group outside of the class. Just like in the previous cycles, the observation stage of the second cycle was carried out by asking a colleague to fill in the observation sheets to check whether all the planned activities were completely carried out, or not. This stage was closed by doing a post-test.

Table 5 shows the posttest scores of Cycle III indicated that the activities in this cycle managed to improve the students' pronunciation skills. In this Posttest more than three-fourths (76.2%) of the participants got "very good" score category, 14.3% got "good" score category, and the rest 9.5% got "fair" category.

Table 5:
The Range of the Participants' Posttest 3 Score

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	16	76.2	Very Good	77.3
2	70-74.9	3	14.3	Good	
3	50-69.9	2	9.5	Fair	
4	≤ 49.9	0	0	Poor	
Total		21	100%		

Since the mean score (77.3) of the whole participants had passed the success indicator (75), the action research was ended. Two days later, the participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire to gauge what they think of the use of the explicit pronunciation instruction in the action research.

As shown by Table 6, all of the participants appreciated the use of texts, audios, videos and transcription in the action research. Everyone agreed or strongly agreed that these media were interesting and helpful in the instructional activities to enhance pronunciation and the majority approved the effectiveness of the program they had just experienced. The majority (90.5%) of them strongly agreed and agreed that the action research significantly developed their pronunciation. The same portion of them also acknowledged that the program increased their confidence to speak in English.

Table 6:
Participants' Perception of the Explicit Pronunciation Instruction

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Use of texts, audios, videos and transcription in the AR makes the activities interesting	0	0,0	0	0,0	11	52,4	10	47,6
2	Use of texts, audios videos and transcription in the AR helps pronunciation enhancement	0	0,0	0	0,0	12	57,1	9	42,9
3	Using the texts, audios, videos and transcription in combination is more interesting than separately	0	0,0	0	0,0	11	52,4	10	47,6
4	Trying to practice the AR materials almost every day outside of the classroom.	0	0,0	4	19,0	8	38,1	9	42,9
5	The AR significantly developed my pronunciation.	0	0,0	2	9,5	9	42,9	10	47,6
6	When the pronunciation AR ends, I will keep on practicing using the project materials	1	4,8	5	23,8	7	33,3	8	38,1
7	The AR increased my self-confidence in English speaking.	0	0,0	2	9,5	9	42,9	10	47,6
8	I recommend using the AR materials and activities in pronunciation development program	2	9,5	6	28,6	6	28,6	7	33,3

DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that the use of explicit instruction effectively enhanced adult EFL learners' pronunciation. Before participating in the action research, 90.4% of the participants got "fair" and "poor" score categories. This is supported by their responses through the Pre Action Questionnaire which revealed more than 71% of them agreed and strongly agreed that their pronunciation made their utterances unintelligible. They also regarded English pronunciation was very difficult to master. Consequently, 61.9% of them felt reluctant to speak English. After they participated in the activities for correcting the pronunciation skills to produce English sounds problematic to them in Cycle I, as shown by the increase of the average score (see Figure 1), their pronunciation skills improved.

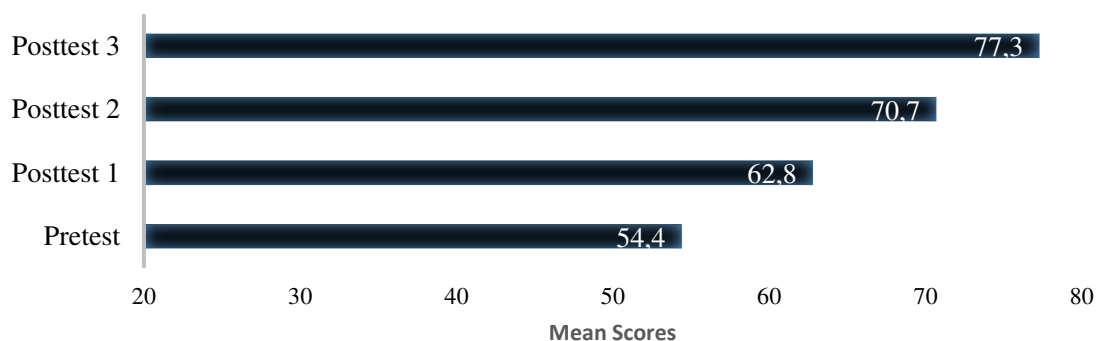


Figure 1: Increase of the Tests' Mean Score

The improvement went higher after the participants completed the activities for enhancing the skills for producing the consonant clusters in the second cycle. Now the mean score increased from 62.8 (Posttest 1) to 70.7 (Posttest 2). Finally, the improvement

was far higher when they completed the activities for using the suprasegmentals (pausing, linking, prominence/non-prominence and intonation) in Cycle III.

In conclusion, and to answer the first research question, the scores obtained by the participants in the tests revealed that the explicit teaching approach increased the students' pronunciation skills.

The data obtained from the Pre Action Questionnaire indicated that before participating in the action research, the students generally viewed their pronunciation skills poor. Almost three-fourths of them strongly disagreed and disagreed that their pronunciation was good, and the same number agreed and strongly agreed that their pronunciation made their utterances unintelligible. Such condition caused 61.9% of them felt reluctant to talk in English and 57.2 % of them often found native speakers' utterances difficult to understand. These confirmed Setter and Jenkins' (2005) proposition that pronunciation "plays a vital role in successful communication both productively and receptively" (p. 2).

Despite these, a very important positive attitude remained in the participants, i.e. more than 90% of them were ready to their best if they were given opportunity to improve their pronunciation. Positive motivation plays an important role in language learning. Dörnyei (1998) accentuated that motivation influences the rate and success of language learning. In addition, Yousofi and Naderfarjad's (2015) study showed that motivation correlated significantly with EFL learners' pronunciation skill. Thus, by having it, the participants had a great opportunity to attain better performance.

In this study, the participants' high motivation was then incorporated with the use of interesting media and activities to carry out the explicit pronunciation instruction. To young adults like the participants, the use of videos or audios (in MP3 files) and phonetics transcription combined with texts in this study were obviously able to keep their interest and motivation in the effort to develop their awareness of segmental and suprasegmental features of English. Listening to an utterance while looking at its written version (the text) at the same time seemed quite effective to enable them to recognize the pronunciation elements in use. The recognition was even enhanced by the videos because they also showed how the organs of speech were employed to produce the utterances.

The use of the phonetic transcriptions with which the participants had been familiar (they had previously learned them in Phonology class) was also advantageous. With its 44 symbols, phonetic transcription can represent one English sound consistently, and this increased the participants recognition, The combination of the media also made it possible to use a variety of learning activities proposed by the influential pronunciation researchers (e.g. Scarcella and Oxford, 1994; Fraser, 1999; Cook, 2001; Thompson, Taylor & Gray, 2001) so that the learning was not boring.

Since the media and activities employed in the action research are interesting, 81% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that they tried to practice the action research materials almost every day outside of the classroom. The percentage of participants committed keeping on practicing using the project materials was also high, 71.4%. The effectiveness of the media was also supported by the fact that all of the participants were also in favor of using them in combination rather than separately.

To conclude this discussion and to answer the second research question as well, the results revealed that the participants perceived the use of explicit teaching approach in this study positively. They not only thought the activities and media interesting but also believed they help them improve their pronunciation. The interest and belief, then, drove them to be active in and outside of the classroom, as well.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of this action research provided strong evidence that the explicit pronunciation instruction managed to improve the participants' pronunciation skills. In addition to their pronunciation skills advancement, this study also changes the participants' attitude. Before the actions implementations, they generally had negative attitudes toward pronunciation. However, their high motivation, combined with the use of interesting activities and media to facilitate the explicit pronunciation instruction in the actions, managed to change the negative attitudes to positive ones.

Since this study is an action research involving a class of preservice EFL teachers, the details could not be generalized to other groups of students. Future studies, therefore, are recommended to modify some aspects of the materials, activities, media, and strategy used in this study to suit the conditions of the target group of students.

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