Advantages and Barriers of TED Talks as medium to learn English Voice and Accents

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the advantages and barriers of TED Talks as medium to learn English Voice and Accents. This study uses descriptive qualitative method. Meanwhile, the data is collected by using observation, interview, as well as documentation. The descriptive qualitative method covers the advantages and barriers of TED Talks as medium to learn English Voice and Accents. The results of this study indicated that the students' ability in analyzing English voice and accents were improved. They enable to differentiate several of English accents. Moreover, they also have better understanding related to the message conveyed from the video they watched. Besides, the students gave positive responses to the implementation of TED Talks video. Most of them mentioned that TED Talks video helps them to comprehend English voice and accents better. Thus, TED talks prove to be a useful material for English teaching as a foreign language considering that they assemble many characteristics that catch students' attention and get them related with the language spoken in actual contexts.

Keywords: *Pronunciation, TED Talks, Voice and Accents, Descriptive Study*

INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects of pronunciation is voice and accents. The issue of voice and accents are significant in the EFL context, especially in learning pronunciation where teachers are the non-native speaker. An accent is a process by which a speaker substitutes a sound from their native language for a sound from English. Given that accent can be easily perceived during oral communication, it plays a crucial role in language learning. Therefore, it is one of the significant features of language usage. Lippi-Green (1993) as cited in Galbat and Sa'adi (2018) defines accent as a no-tight set of prosodic and segmental qualities distributed over geographic and or social space. A variety of features at different levels make up this construct (e.g. segmental features such the phonological arrangement of vowels and consonants, namely, pronunciation, prosodic features including tempo, stress, pitch, and tempo). As far as non-native speakers are concerned, accent refers to the break-down of the phonology of the native language into the L2.

Based on the results of observations made by researchers in English education study programs, students still encounter difficulties in English pronunciation. Pronunciation represents one component that supports speaking skills. Lecturers also have obstacles in teaching pronunciation. Problems that often arise are limited material and references used. Lecturers often use or provide material obtained from the internet or related books. Activities that are often carried out are to provide students a word or sentence and ask them to make a phonetic symbol and recite it. Teaching pronunciation is teaching about aspects that influence the meaning of sentences through segmental phonemes. This is very important because pronunciation is a basic skill in speaking. Therefore, good pronunciation avoids misunderstandings in communication. Besides, the obstacles faced by students are lack of understanding of accents in English. They only understand English pronunciation using American accents. When lecturer gives an example of the video with a different accent, they have difficulty in understanding the meaning delivered by the speakers.

Learning English that supported by teaching media such as audiovisuals will make it easy for students to learn and make students interested. Lecturers should be a good model for students, if

not; they will imitate wrong pronunciation and make mistakes. Lecturers must produce accurate sounds and their sound production to students to make students truly understand how the correct pronunciation is produced. Harmer (2000) states that concentrating on sound, showing where they are made in the mouth, makes students aware of where words should be emphasized - all things give them additional information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of increasing understanding and clarity.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the advantages and barriers of TED Talks as medium to learn English Voice and Accents. This study is expected to give some understanding of the students' perceptibility in the different English accents and their perceived ease of comprehending them. It also, hopefully, gives a broader view concerning English accents particularly for those who are involved in teaching English as a foreign language.

Regarding the problems described above, a solution is needed to facilitate students to improve their abilities in analyzing different accent in learning pronunciation. In this case, one of the obstacles faced by lecturers and students is limited media. Therefore, researchers want to use TED Talks Video Program to improve understanding of English voice and accents. There are plenty of resources or digital platforms where we can find authentic videos that could help us to provide the students with the means to communicate using English; however, it is worthy to clarify that our interest in TED is because of its feature that brings the conference's transcription besides the characteristic that every video has its subtitles that are not auto-generated as it happens with many videos on YouTube, for instance.

Maria, Junior, and Astrid (2016) on their research entitle "*TED Talks as an ICT tool to promote Communicative skill in EFL Students*" stated that TED talks prove to be a useful material for English teaching as a foreign language considering that they assemble many characteristics that catch students' attention and get them related with the language spoken in actual contexts. One of the main points made when using TED talks is that students are not just listening to the speaker, that is what would happen in a recording, but they are watching the speaker's movements and facial expressions that permit the students to gather much more information about the speech and include it in their repertoire to use it in future occasions. Another aspect to remark is the accuracy of TED subtitles that, additionally, give more information to the students about what they are listening, as well as let the students gather much more words, meaning vocabulary than they would catch if just listening.

In line with the important of accent in learning pronunciation, Galbat and Sa'adi (2018) on their research entitled "*Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Learning Accent*" argued the issue of foreign accent has been the focus of many researchers and many teachers attempted to sound as native-like as possible to better teach native English accent. The present study attempted to uncover the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of accent, the way they viewed their accent, and how English accent can be improved. Based on the analysis performed on the data collected through questionnaires and interviews, it was found that teachers care about learning accent and they considered it valuable and important. They admitted that they have a foreign accent to some degree and they did not seem to be happy with a foreign accent and were more in favors of native-like accent. Regarding the strategies to improve English accent, they mentioned techniques like listening to authentic language, understanding pronunciation rules, and comparing people's accent with their accent, watching English movies, noticing stress, and pronunciation patterns, imitating, speaking with native people, using books, and recording and monitoring their speeches.

METHOD

The purposes of this study were to reveal out the advantages and barriers of TED Talks as medium to learn English Voice and Accents. To achieve these objectives, the research method used in this study was qualitative action research which is a methodology that includes action and research. McKay (2006) establishes that action research involves a systematic inquiry into the issues and problems that teachers face aiming to improve pedagogical practices. It is important to highlight that we do not only want to observe the phenomenon and try to understand it but also, as practitioners, we want to make a real immersion in the classroom through the implementation of certain activities that have been based on authentic videos of the digital platform TED, in order to reflect and improve our pedagogical practices; in this manner, as teachers concerned about the methodologies used in the classroom and its results as well as the problems that arise there, the action research method is the most suitable for responding to the research question that guides our study.

This study was carried out in English Education Study Program with 22 students from the second semester as the participants. The reason why the researcher chooses the participants was that they are learning pronunciation in that semester. There are many data collection instruments used in qualitative research, where each one has special characteristics to obtain diverse types and quantities of information. Considering the research question that we seek to answer we have chosen three methods of data collection for their accuracy. The instruments were the interview, questionnaire, and teacher journal.

Data analysis was carried out after data were collected. The collected data were analyzed to answer the research questions. To answer the first research question, data were obtained from the results of the pronunciation learning activities using the TED Talks Program media and interviews. The results of the interviews were transcribed and codified then categorized. Then, the data were categorized and interpreted based on the relevant theory. To answer the second question, data were collected through interviews. The results of the interviews were transcribed and codified then categorized. Then, the data were interpreted based on the relevant theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of teaching pronunciation for many EFL learners and the goal of these learners are to be understood in conversation but other learners wish to communicate with native speakers. According to Fraser (2000), learners should be able to speak English with their favorite accent which is easily understandable to an English speaker. Jenkins (2002) stated that learners need to be intelligible to both native and non-native speakers. Teachers should help learners become both intelligible and easy to understand. EFL learners cannot completely pronounce English words exactly like native speakers. The students' responses towards the use of TED Talks video can be seen from students' participation. In every cycle of implementation of TED Talks video, the researchers provided students to make a group and have some discussion related to the video watched. The use of TED Talks video makes students feel encouraged to speak. They showed more critical and reflexive thinking regarding different accents in part of the world. Students were more prone to comment on the different accent as well as they were more motivated in expressing what they were thinking, also, they were more open to sharing their ideas with others when they were analyzing accent in groups. Besides that, the result of questionnaire support that using TED Talks provided students to have a chance to speak up with others. On the other hand, the use of TED Talks can help students in understanding different accent in part of the world.

This is supported by other students that claim in the questionnaire that *"the use of TED Talks Video help in learning pronunciation especially in understanding different."*

Students expressed that they felt more comfortable doing the activities proposed by the researchers. Students also remarked the fact that most of the themes in TED talks are socially and culturally relevant. The researchers pointed out this better in the attitude towards the activities in English based on the videos. They stressed the fact that when other activities used to be assigned, students were reluctant to do them; students were careless about what was going on in the English class; instead, when TED talks were presented students got their complete attention to understand what the speaker was saying and use the words caught to express what they were thinking.

Learners communicated with their partners using the words in the proper context and more confidently thanks to the vocabulary and the exposure to which they were subject. Besides, students claimed they felt more confident speaking since they already counted with the elements that allowed them to express their ideas, their feelings and, their standpoints regarding different accent. Students noticed that there are diverse ways to pronounce the language; therefore, it is not a reason to quit speaking. Some learners declared that they thought the only pronunciations to speak English was American and British and realizing that around the world there are singular ways to speak encourages doing so. According to one of the students, *"learning pronunciation using TED Talks Video was good and helpful, because hearing people talk continuously like those accents, makes us follow the flow of voice and accent."*

CONCLUSION

TED talks prove to be a useful material for English teaching as a foreign language considering that they assemble many characteristics that catch students' attention and get them related to the language spoken in actual contexts. One of the main points made when using TED talks is that students are not just listening to the speaker, that is what would happen in a recording, but they are watching the speaker's movements and facial expressions that permit the students to gather much more information about the speech and include it in their repertoire to use it in future occasions. Also, the fact that the speakers in TED talks come from all around the world lets the students realize that learning English goes beyond doing a perfect pronunciation, but it also includes using the language to express ideas no matter if it is correct or no, perfection will come with the practice. At the first stages, the important thing is to try. This gets the students related with more pronunciations besides American and British which eventually will create confidence in the students because they will not pay as much attention as they would pay to the content of what they are saying. With this, we are not declaring that pronunciation is unimportant; we are trying to make the point that students should not be afraid of speaking just because they do not pronounce perfectly American or perfectly British. Additionally, socio-cultural topics contained in the TED talks add to the motivation and interest of the students to participate actively in the proposed activities. Something important to remark is that during the English class it is important to promote the use of the target language to the extent possible and using topics that concern the students is an effective way to do it. With this, the idea is to create an environment in which the students get related to the target language and doing so, create a path to learn it meaningfully. Creating such an environment is quite important because those few hours that the students are in English class is possibly the only time that they are in contact with the language.

One more aspect to highlight is how convenient is the use of ICT's in the English classroom, considering that nowadays most of the students are more prone to pay attention to a screen than to a board it would be better if as teachers we make of those devices an ally more than an enemy. Maybe the traditional elements, like the board or the course books can be used too but as a complement to the other tools and not as the only resources available. Finally, considering that some aspects were not considered in deep in this research, we propose that further investigation could be focused on how the TED talks promote other skills such as critical thinking, citizenship abilities, and 21st-century skills. Likewise, further investigation with other platforms as authentic material could be considered.

Acknowledgments

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