

Teaching Students Pronunciation Skills through Tongue Twister Exercises

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Abstract

This study discusses about the teaching of English pronunciation practices to the students of Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. This study was qualitative research which carried out in the learning of the English Education for Early Childhood subject of Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. The researchers chose tongue twisters as the material used to train students' ability to pronounce their vocabularies in English. The result shows that tongue twister exercises can improve their English vocabulary pronunciation skill; and their abilities to pronounce every vocabulary will be stored in the child's memory and become the main standard in the next learning process.

Keywords: *pronunciation skills, tongue twister*

Introduction

Students of early childhood education are prepared to be the teachers of early childhood students or kindergarten. They are prepared with knowledge and skills about how to manage and handle the teaching and learning processes of the very young people. They learn many kinds of subject related to the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the young children. They also learn the theories about how children learn a language become the basic knowledge they need in teaching the children to learn a foreign language such as English and Arabic.

One of the compulsory subjects that have to be taken by the students of early childhood education in their fourth semester is the English for young learner subject based on the curriculum implemented in the early childhood education program of study for the academic period of 2017/2018. The subject is

different with the general English subject that they have already taken during their second semester.

One of the subjects that are compulsory courses that students must take in semester IV based on the applicable curriculum in Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa in the 2017/2018 academic year. Unlike the English course they had taken in the previous semester which emphasized students' skills in understanding and using English in general, this course focused more on students' ability to understand various kinds of knowledge and skills in teaching English to early childhood.

The ability of students to choose the right English material and according to the child's level of development, to choose English games that are interesting and useful

for children, and to take advantage of appropriate English learning technology and applications and according to the level of early childhood development are the objectives of learning in general that must be achieved by students after participating in the learning of these subjects.

In learning this subject, it is hoped that students will be able to practice various kinds of English learning activities for early childhood through word games in English, singing children's songs in English, storytelling or storytelling in English, using computer or smartphone applications for language learning. English, and so on. Every student who will take or take this course is assumed to have sufficient knowledge and English skills, namely being able to pronounce every English vocabulary well, understand English grammar well in general, be able to sing English songs with pronunciation, intonation and proper emphasis, etc., so that you can easily follow the material given in this course. In addition, they are also expected to be a model for using English that is good for early childhood students when they become educators in the future and what they say and say their students will follow and imitate.

Based on the results of the researchers' observations of the fourth semester students of early childhood education for the 2017/2018 academic year who took the English language education course for early childhood, the researchers identified several problems that these students still have,

including: 1) most students are not used to it. and not able to read English text well; 2) some students still pronounce English vocabulary by following the spelling of the word; 3) most students still have difficulty pronouncing vocabulary that has sound elements that they rarely find in their native language, namely Indonesian, such as sounds /tj/, /sh/, /th/ sounds /t/ in past vocabulary or with the ending - ed; 4) most students are unable to identify the words they read in English, and so on.

Based on the results of the initial identification above, the researchers compiled a research plan using tongue twister training to improve the pronunciation skills of the fourth semester students of the Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

Theoretical Review

English Education for Early Childhood or better known as English for Young Learners (EYL) is a field of science that has become the focus of language education practitioners, which is one of the studies that specifically addresses the theory of teaching English to early childhood.

Although there are different views on when is the best time to teach a foreign language, especially English, the reality is that in most countries English is studied by very young learners. In some countries English is a compulsory subject that elementary school students must study. The

increasing need for English language skills, especially for parents who want their children to have better education and job opportunities, has made more and more educational institutions for English language education programs for early childhood (Shin & Crandall, 2013).

Previous studies on second language learning state that there is a "critical period" or "sensitive period", namely the period before puberty in which children can acquire foreign language skills just like a native speaker. This view assumes that childhood is an easier time than adults who are often frustrated when they are unable to master a foreign language (Shin & Crandall, 2013).

There are a lot of differences in what five-year-olds and ten-year-olds learn according to Scott. In relation to language learning he states that they can use language skills well before they realize it. This means that they acquire these language skills well even without realizing it. They are competent users of their native language so they basically know the rules of grammar (Scott & Yttereberg, 1990).

Even though they are not a language teacher, a prospective Early Childhood Education teacher must have good English skills, especially in pronouncing the vocabulary they teach their students. The problems experienced by most of the early childhood teachers are the problems experienced by most English learners in Indonesia, especially those related to pronunciation and spelling. Most of them

often get stuck on the existing spelling when trying to pronounce words in written form. Some of the vocabulary that often confuses them such as words that have a syllable of -*augh* in *laugh* or *cough* which should read the same sound as the word *off* is often misread (Harmer, 2012).

Teaching about how to pronounce the correct vocabulary in English, especially to prospective early childhood education teachers, is very important. Consideration of student pronunciation errors and how they affect communication skills were the main reasons that Kelly pointed out that pronounce errors that are made by students can make it difficult for other speakers to understand what they are saying (Kelly, 2000).

There are many ways that can be done to train students not to fall into the same mistakes in pronouncing vocabulary in English, such as practicing pronouncing sentences which are called exercises same letter different sound, same sound different letters, minimal pairs, same sound rhymes, odd one out, weak or strong, sound and grammar, and tongue twister (Harmer, 2012). Some previous researches show that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn. Potentially difficult words are words that contain sounds that are unfamiliar (familiar) to some students (Thornburry, 2002).

Method

This research was a qualitative study which tried to describe qualitatively the

conditions experienced by students before and after practicing tongue twister exercises. This research included a case study which was carried out in the learning of the English Language Education for Early Childhood subject, students of Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

Based on the identification results of the problems faced by students as described in the introduction above, the researchers chose tongue twisters as the material used to train students' ability to pronounce the vocabulary in English they were learning.

Result

After knowing the problems faced by most students in learning English, especially the difficulties they face when pronouncing vocabulary in English, researchers compile a learning plan that can overcome these problems. Using references from the British Council website, the researchers organized the following learning activities.

Tongue Twister (listening activities)

Researchers asked students to access the British Council, org website and select some tongue twister material through their mobile devices, download tongue twister material in mp3 format, play the material, and listen to each material several times through their respective devices. Each student is encouraged to use their own

headset so as not to disturb other students when listening to the material.

Picture 1. Tongue Twister List on British Council Learn English for Kids



Several tongue twister titles are available on the British Council Learn English for Kid website <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/tongue-twisters> such as *big black bug*, *blue blue bird*, *bye bye*, *cup of coffee*, *eleven elves*, *fresh fried fish*, *fuzzy wuzzy*, *I scream you scream*, and so on. They access via an internet browser on their smartphone device and listen one by one every tongue twister expression on the site. With this activity, students are expected to have the same perception of the pronunciation of vocabulary in each expression. The uniformity of the sound of both consonants and vowels of each expression is their main attraction.

Practicing Tongue Twister

After listening to the material for about 30 minutes, students were given the opportunity to practice by repeating every phrase or sentence they saw in front of their

friends in class. This activity is quite interesting because all students try to read every tongue twister in the classroom so that the class atmosphere becomes very noisy but under control. They seemed very enthusiastic about practicing every phrase they learned. After being confident in their abilities, each student came to the front of the class and practiced reading some of the phrases they had memorized in front of the class.

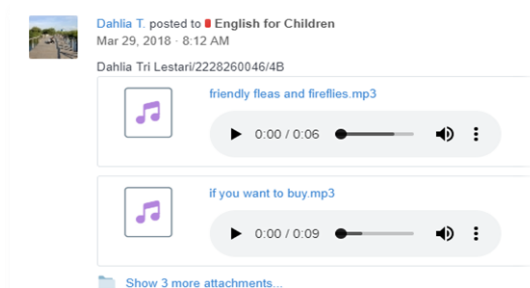
Recording & Evaluating the Expressions

This stage is expected to document the results obtained by students after listening and practicing tongue twisters, in addition to being a tool to evaluate their respective abilities. Each student is given the opportunity to repeat the recording until they are sure of their results.

Uploading the Best Recording

Every student who has completed their recordings can upload them via the Edmodo group. These results can make it easier for researchers to collect and analyze the recorded data so that they can find out the increase in students' ability to pronounce English words.

Picture 2. Recordings uploaded through Edmodo



Conclusion

Based on the results of research that has been carried out in Early Childhood Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa at the fourth semester, it can be seen that tongue twister exercises can improve their English vocabulary pronunciation skills.

A prospective teacher of early childhood education has greater demands in making the initial foundation for the learning of their students. In accordance with the nature of children as the best imitators Early Childhood teachers must become good models that their students will imitate. Their ability to pronounce every vocabulary they introduce will be stored in the child's memory and become the main standard in the next learning process. For this reason, the ability to pronounce English vocabulary correctly will make them an appropriate English learning model for their students.

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