

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS READING ALOUD PRACTICE TO IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION

Hanna Suteja

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang

Suteja.hanna@gmail.com

Abstract: It should clearly reflect the contents of the paper. Pronunciation is one of the neglected aspects in teaching and learning EFL that focuses on the communication approach. As long as the message is conveyed, inaccurate pronunciation can be overlooked. However, intelligible, and accurate pronunciation are also important for successful communication for EFL learners. This is even more crucial for English teachers as they become the role model for their students. This study is to find out the students' attitudes towards the task of reading aloud to improve their pronunciation as well as their confidence. The subjects were twenty freshmen of pre-service teachers majoring in English education. Since practicing pronunciation requires a model speaker, this study used one bible mobile application that provides the assigned 28 chapters of the text as well as the model speaker reading aloud the text. The subjects were asked to first listen to the model reading aloud each chapter and practice reading it aloud on their own afterwards. They could practice listening and reading aloud as many as three times for each chapter and reported their activity in a given journal template. A google form survey was conducted to find out their responses after one-month practice. The result shows that most subjects found reading aloud practice after listening to the model speaker help them articulate English words in the text more clearly and accurately. Most of them also reported that they became more fluent and grew in their confidence to read aloud in English. In addition, they learn how to read with proper stress and intonation.

Keywords: pronunciation, reading aloud, listening, model speaker, confidence

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are more and more people who understand the importance of learning foreign languages to be able to communicate globally. English has been the main foreign language in Indonesia until now. Indonesian people have also been exposed more to English than other foreign language through schools, works, movies, songs, news, social media, games. However, this doesn't make the English proficiency of Indonesian people better. According to Coleman (2009) as cited in (Renandya et al., 2018) among 27,000 Indonesian teachers at International Standard School only one percent reached the high proficiency level of English. Half of these teachers were in their low level and the rest were in the category of elementary to intermediate. The more recent English Proficiency Index in 2023 (EF EPI EF English Proficiency Index A Ranking of 113 Countries and Regions by English Skills, 2023) conducted by English First all over the world, Indonesia is categorized in the low proficiency ranking 79th out of 113 countries in the world and 13th out of 23 Asian countries Compared to the EPI result in 2017 (*Ef-Epi-2017-English*, 2017) participated by 80 countries Indonesia ranked 39th in the category of low proficiency. Even though the test is not as rigid such as TOEFL IBT or

IELTS, their test has been used by government, international organization, and business leaders (Renandya et al., 2018). Therefore, looking at those numbers, it can be assumed that there has not been much improvement of Indonesians' proficiency in English in the last six years.

Since the subjects of this study are pre-service teachers majoring in English education, their English proficiency matters for their study as well as for their future career as teachers. According to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) having language proficiency means being able to produce and understand a certain language. In oral context language production involves producing speech that requires intelligible pronunciation so that the listeners can comprehend what is being communicated. However, uttering speech sound in a foreign language, English in this study, can be challenging. Indonesian learners who are used to pronounce words exactly as they are written will find English word pronunciation is unpredictable. Moreover, if learners come across new vocabulary that they have never heard before, they do not feel confident in saying the word aloud. This problem becomes worse since teaching pronunciation explicitly is not considered important these days. Harmer in (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) discovered that learners considered practicing pronunciation wasted their time. Laurea in (Wongsuriya, 2020a) stated that Thai teachers did not give enough attention to teach pronunciation. Their focus in teaching English was more on grammar and vocabulary. Henderson et.al. cited in (Fabra, 2022) also found out that there were not many teachers in European countries teaching pronunciation. They only allocate 25% of teaching time for practicing pronunciation. As a result, communication is conducted despite errors in pronunciation; as long as the message is conveyed, mispronunciation can be tolerated.

Learning pronunciation cannot be done by only teaching pronunciation theories. Since pronunciation is a part of speaking skill, words must be articulated. Learners must practice producing correct speech sound in the target language. There are two main aspects in pronunciation: suprasegmental and segmental aspects. The suprasegmental aspect deals with intonation stress, accent, whereas segmental aspect is about pronouncing speech sounds of consonants and vowels. Pronouncing English vowels and consonants accurately can be challenging for Indonesian learners, especially for those vowels and consonants that are not in Indonesian's repertoire. English also has more minimal pairs words than Indonesian; their pronunciation is the same even though their spelling is different. In the interview with his respondents regarding their problems in pronunciation, they proposed three strategies (Hidayatulloh, 2023). They need to be exposed more to English; guided by teachers or experts and assigned serious practice with teachers, peers, native speakers of English. They also proposed practice using the platform such as ELSA (English Learning Speaking Assistant). This means that the participants who wanted to improve their pronunciation realize the importance of serious practice either with the help of experts, teachers, native speakers, or by using technology that they can use independently.

According to Gottlieb (2006) in (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) pronunciation teaching must be understood as having three aspects: perception, production, and prediction. Learning pronunciation involves active listening, articulating the speech sound, and being able to predict and respond to different situations in oral communication. For the production aspect, it involves articulating the target language speech. Elicitation Imitation Task (EIT) may be a suitable method to practice pronunciation. Gailard and Tremblay in (Fabra, 2022) said that Elicitation Imitation Task (EIT) has been widely used to assess oral proficiency. This method involves producing imitation of the speech sound after listening to the model. They stated that EIT complimented reading aloud method to practice pronunciation. In reading aloud only learners may practice pronunciation without a model. Even though the EIT method does not necessarily give feedback to mispronunciation, it gives a model to follow for correct pronunciation. EIT was also proved to be valid and reliable for assessing second language oral proficiency. In their study (Nurani &

Rosyada, 2015) reported that using reading aloud to assess pronunciation succeeded in improving pronunciation of their adult ESL participants. Moreover, reading aloud increased the participants' motivation to practice pronunciation. In his research (Wongsuriya, 2020b) found that using mobile applications was helpful for students who had problems in pronouncing difficult words, and for those lived in remote places and had not access to English native speakers. In this vein, computer software can also be used as a means of teaching English pronunciation. Hismanoglu cited in (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017) said that practicing using pronunciation software is more stress-free since they can do the practice individually, at their own pace, and get feedback afterward. Since class time is usually limited, practice can be done outside class in their own time. Text-Aloud Software is another pronunciation software that can help EFL students to improve their pronunciation. (Roslaini & Komara, 2020) found this software increased their students' mastery in pronunciation. Therefore, assigning pronunciation practice using mobile applications, online platforms, and computer software is very convenient both for teachers and students. For teachers the use of various technologies can reduce their burden in teaching pronunciation with their limited time in class.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Are the subjects more confident with their pronunciation after the reading aloud task?
2. Do the subjects think their pronunciation is improved after the reading aloud practice?
3. Does the reading aloud practice increase their motivation to practice more with other English texts?

RESEARCH METHOD

There are twenty subjects who participated in this study. They are first year pre-service teacher majoring in English Education. Since they are all Christians and study at a Christian university, they are exposed to devotion and chapel discussing the Bible. Therefore, as English students they also need to learn the English vocabulary which are often used in the Bible as well as how they are pronounced so that they can understand the sermon in English. Even though they are Christians and English is their major, some of them never read the English Bible.

The purpose of this research is to find out the students' perception on reading aloud task to improve their pronunciation. There were two google form surveys distributed to the participants, one before and one after the reading aloud assignment. The first survey was conducted to find out about their problems in pronunciation and their efforts to improve their pronunciation. After that, the participants were assigned to practice reading aloud from one book of the Bible- Matthew. The book of Matthew is the first book of the four Gospel books and the first book in the New Testament. The participants were instructed to download one Bible application of New International Version (NIV) that provides the text as well as the audio of a model speaker reading aloud the text. First, they listened to the model speaker as they were reading the text. They were instructed to read one chapter or more each day. After listening to audio, they practiced pronunciation by reading aloud the text one to three times. To record their learning activities each participant wrote their report in the given journal template. At the end of the month the second survey was conducted to find out their perception on the reading aloud assignments. A focus group discussion was conducted to confirm their responses to the survey. Third-level headings should be written using Sentence Case. Paragraphs should be indented as specified earlier.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PRE-SURVEY

There are four questions in the pre-survey: how important comprehensible and correct pronunciation for communication having; how confident they are when reading aloud; what makes reading aloud difficult; what they do to improve pronunciation. The result of the first question is that 75% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that comprehensible and correct pronunciation is crucial for communication. The result of the second question shows that only one (5%) out of twenty participants was very confident. Nine students (45%) were confident; eight (40%) were not so confident; and two (20%) were not very confident. As for what makes reading aloud difficult, the responses can be categorized in three main reasons. First, they were not sure how to pronounce unfamiliar or new words; there are 17 participants (85%) who acknowledged this problem. The second problem is articulation. Two participants (10%) reported they were not used to reading aloud. The third problem was embarrassment reported by one participant only (5%). Looking at their responses to the four questions, all participants agreed that having correct and comprehensible was necessary for successful communication in English. In general, the participants were quite confident in reading aloud, however, their confidence drops when they came across unfamiliar or new words. With the third question, it can be assumed that the participants did not have many opportunities to practice reading aloud during their previous study. This is understandable since pronunciation practice in class is generally not given priority by teachers. Laurea (2015) in (Wongsuriya, 2020b) stated that Thai teachers did not give enough attention to teach pronunciation. Their focus in teaching English was more on grammar and vocabulary. Henderson et.al. (2015) cited in (Fabra, 2022) also found out that there were not many teachers in European countries who gave priority on teaching pronunciation. As for the last reason-feeling embarrassed for afraid of making mistakes was a minor reason experienced by very few respondents of this study. The fourth question is about the participants' effort to improve their pronunciation shown in Table 1.

Table 1. How to improve pronunciation

Activities	Number	%
Listening to English songs	19	95
Watching movies in English	19	95
Singing (imitating) the lyrics	17	85
Reading aloud	8	40
Watching/listening to talk shows in English	7	35
Watching/listening to English news	3	15
Search new words in dictionary	1	5
Always trying to talk in English with peers	1	5
Watching learning videos about English	1	5
Watching short videos in social media	1	5

From Table 1. Listening to English songs, watching English movies, and singing the lyric of English songs were the most preferred activities to learn pronunciation. In general, EFL learners do this to improve their overall English proficiency not only for pronunciation. Less than half did reading aloud to improve pronunciation. Checking dictionaries, talking in English with peers, watching learning videos about English, and watching short videos in social media are the least popular activities to improve pronunciation. Overall watching movies and listening to

music are usually considered more as entertainment in their life rather than as learning activities compared to the other activities that get lower percentage.

Post survey

After one month practicing reading aloud, another survey was conducted to find out the participants' perception of their activities. The participants were also asked to explain their responses to question number 6 and 7.

Table 2. Reading aloud

Question	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
1. Reading aloud after listening to the model speaker helps me learn the correct & accurate pronunciation. (segmental)	65	35	5	0	0
2. Reading aloud after listening to the English Bible reading helps me read more fluently.	40	50	10	0	0
3. By practicing reading aloud I learn how to do the chunking/phrasing.	35	50	10	5	0
4. By reading aloud I learn how to read aloud with proper stress & intonation	35	55	10	0	0
5. I become more confident to read aloud in English	25	60	15	0	0
6. I will keep practicing reading aloud in English (not only the English Bible)	45	55	0	0	0

SA-SD= strongly agree-strongly disagree N=neutral

For question 1 65% participants strongly agreed and 35% agreed that reading aloud helped them practice correct articulation of English words in the text. None disagreed and only one participant was not sure. This refers to the segmental aspect of pronunciation in articulating consonants and vowels of the target words. Positive responses were given to question 2: 40% strongly agreed, and 50% agreed. Only two participants (10%) were not sure of their improved fluency after the reading aloud task. The positive responses to question 3 (35% and 50%) and question 4 (35% and 55%) were also recorded for the suprasegmental aspect of pronunciation such as chunking or phrasing, and proper stress and intonation while reading aloud. Only very few respondents (10%) for question 3. Regarding confidence in question 4 more than half (60%) acknowledged their agreement and 25% strongly agreed with their increased confidence. Only three participants (15%) were not sure about their increased confidence. More than half respondents (55%) agreed to continue reading aloud practice and 45% acknowledged their strong agreement to keep practicing reading aloud with other English texts. The open-ended responses in the post survey confirmed that reading aloud practice helped them speak more fluently with clear articulation especially when pronouncing new words. They said practice

made perfect and this practice was beneficial for their future job as teachers. Those who agreed to question 5 said that they were more aware of correct pronunciation for understanding. Reading aloud practice helped them to be confident and fluent, meaning not stopping in the middle of utterances. They even learned grammar and new vocabulary in the Bible. As for those who chose neutral for their answer to question 5, they thought that their pronunciation did not improve since they still made a lot of mistakes. The open-ended responses to question 6 all participants agreed to continue practicing reading aloud other resources in English in social media, internet, the Bible, song lyrics, novels, and story books. This indicates that they realized they could use various resources in English to practice reading aloud in their own time so that they could improve their pronunciation. Those who were not sure of their improvement in confidence and articulation because they still made mistakes is understandable. Compared to Indonesian pronunciation, pronouncing English words is challenging because of its opaque orthography (Fabra, 2022). Therefore, learning and practicing pronunciation requires motivation, effort, and time, as well as proper guidance and instruction from teachers and complemented with technology.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the results of the post survey, it can be concluded that most respondents become more confident after the reading aloud task. They also acknowledge that their pronunciation has improved in terms of stress, intonation, and chunking by imitating the model speaker and practice reading aloud the same text several times. The subjects also admit that they can read aloud more fluently with better pronunciation. Moreover, they would like to keep practicing reading aloud with the Bible as well as other English texts. Hence, reading aloud practice help them realize the importance of continuous practice with various texts to improve their pronunciation.

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