

USING TONGUE TWISTER TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION FOR THE FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Currently, English has been used as an international language by people all over the world. In Vietnam, English is taught from primary schools or even from kindergarten to university; however, there are numerous Vietnamese students still find it is hard to speak English well. Especially, many Vietnamese first-year English majors often feel confused in pronouncing because of some inappropriate approaches or techniques. Thus, the aim of this study is to find out the result of using the tongue twister technique to help students improve their pronunciation. The participants of this study are first-year English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Education. Through the application of the student's practical approaches, the study found out the current state of using tongue twisters technique in learning pronunciation and the effectiveness of using tongue twister technique to enhance students' pronunciation skills at Thai Nguyen University of Education. Classroom observation checklist, pre-test and post-test were employed as data collection instrument with the purpose of achieving data for the study. The findings of the study will be useful for both teachers and students' English speaking teaching and learning at Thai Nguyen University of Education in particular as well as all of the universities in general.

Key words: *tongue twister; pronunciation skills; pronunciation analysis; first – year English major; Thai Nguyen University of Education*

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SỬ DỤNG KỸ THUẬT TONGUE TWISTER ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG PHÁT ÂM TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ NĂM THỨ NHẤT TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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TÓM TẮT

Hiện nay, mọi người sử dụng Tiếng Anh như một ngôn ngữ quốc tế. Ở Việt Nam, tiếng Anh được dạy từ tiểu học hoặc thậm chí từ mẫu giáo đến đại học; tuy nhiên, có một số lượng lớn sinh viên Việt Nam vẫn gặp khó khăn trong việc nói tiếng Anh một cách trôi chảy. Đặc biệt, nhiều sinh viên chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh năm thứ nhất ở Việt Nam thường cảm thấy bối rối khi phát âm do cách tiếp cận hoặc phương pháp không phù hợp. Vì vậy, mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm ra kết quả của việc sử dụng kỹ thuật tongue twister để giúp sinh viên cải thiện phát âm. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu này là sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh năm thứ nhất tại trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên. Thông qua việc áp dụng các phương pháp tiếp cận thực tế, nghiên cứu đã phát hiện ra thực trạng sử dụng phương pháp tongue twister trong việc học phát âm, hiệu quả của việc sử dụng phương pháp tongue twister để nâng cao kỹ năng phát âm của sinh viên tại trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên. Phiếu theo dõi lớp học trong tiết học nói, bài kiểm tra đầu, cuối được dùng làm công cụ thu thập số liệu cho nghiên cứu. Những phát hiện của nghiên cứu hy vọng sẽ hữu ích trong việc dạy và học kỹ năng nói cho giảng viên và sinh viên Trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên nói riêng cũng như tất cả các trường đại học nói chung.

Từ khóa: *tongue twister; kỹ năng phát âm; phân tích phát âm; sinh viên chuyên ngữ năm nhất; trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên*

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1. Introduction

Considering English language for international communication, this should be highly focused by students, especially the English first-year major as early as possible. Speaking skills may be the most challenging one for them to overcome because students have lack of opportunities to practice English, and mother tongue is used all the time. There is a fact that if the speakers pronounce incorrectly, the listeners may misapprehend the content that speakers are talking about. Pronunciation becomes one of the most important parts to be taught to the learners other than grammar and vocabulary. Pronunciation refers to how we produce the sound that we used to make meaning when we speak.

In fact, the students' pronunciation capacity is still low. Teachers should give correct pronunciation as well as an appropriate pronunciation teaching technique. However, many Vietnamese teachers still prefer the traditional approaches of English teaching. The researcher uses tongue twister technique in order to promote students' interest and improve their pronunciation.

This study aims to (1) investigate the development of pronunciation skills of the first- year English majors' pronunciation at Thai Nguyen University of Education by using tongue twister technique; (2) to see how it influences the learning behavior of the English freshmen and their improvement in pronunciation. Tongue twister technique enables students to achieve awareness of their pronunciation issues, helps them tackle the problems which lead to simultaneous response, increase memory, improve listening, relieving the monotony of the lesson, and allows students to practice the language without fear of making mistakes. Practicing with tongue twister, students can raise the sense of initiative in pronouncing and try to tongue twister out and to take risk making mistakes.

2. Literature review

2.1 *The concepts of pronunciation*

Pronunciation is one of the key factors that determine the success of a conversation. If speakers' pronunciation is incorrect during the conversation which can make listeners feel uncomfortable or even misunderstand their ideas.

According to Hornby, pronunciation is the way in which a word or a language is spoken. This may refer to generally agreed-upon sequences of sounds used in speaking a given word or language in a specific dialect (correct pronunciation), or simply the way a particular individual speaks a word or language. A word can be spoken in different ways by various individual or groups, depending on many factors, such as: the duration of the cultural exposure of their childhood, the location of their current residence, speech or voice disorders, their ethnic group, their social class, or their education [1].

According to Rebecca [2], pronunciation is the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability.

2.2 *Tongue twister*

In Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, tongue twister is a sentence or phrase that is intended to be difficult to say, especially when repeated quickly and often [3].

According to Carmen [4], a tongue-twister is a sequence of words that is difficult to pronounce quickly and correctly.

2.3 *Advantages of using tongue twister*

According to Ulupi Sitoresmi [5], there are several advantages of using tongue twister in teaching English pronunciation:

- Helping students focus on the lesson and take the problems which lead to quick improvement.

- Improving students' motivation and pronunciation.
- Being a great drill for new language learners who have trouble articulating the sound of the new language that are different from those of their own language.
- Increasing learning environment.
- Enhancing student self-confidence.
- Helping students feel more relaxed in class.

3. Methodology

This research was carried out on 35 first-year English majors of Thai Nguyen University of Education. The steps designed by Kemmis and McTaggart [6] are adapted in this research. They are: planning (identify the problem), acting (collect the data), observing (analyze and interpret data), and reflecting (develop and action).

The researcher prepared 8 lesson plans for 8 periods and taught pronunciation by using tongue twister technique. Pre-test was used to assess the students' speaking ability at the first period. In each period, students are required to listen to the teacher and engage in tongue

twister activities in class while the researcher was observing students' behaviors during the period. Observation checklist consists of students' activities to see the obstacles encountered during the process.

After all, a post- test was utilized to investigate the improvement of students' speaking.

4. Findings and discussions

The results of the observation are presented in table 1 and 2. It can be seen that students gained positive behaviors in engaging activities and felt interested in group work.

Obviously, students were extremely enthusiastic and cooperative in group work. They were motivated to learn pronunciation because of the unheard-of technique – tongue twister. Some students started to ask the meaning of the tongue twister sentences to clarify their understanding. They made obvious progress in pronunciation and showed their enthusiasm in the whole process.

Table 1. Observation checklist in the first period

No	Content	Grade	%
1	Students listen carefully to the teacher's instructions	8	80
2	Students take the initiative in all activities	7	70
3	Students try to express themselves when they answer teacher.	6	60
4	Students make questions to get more specific information	6	60
5	Students have positive behaviors in engaging in activities	8	80
6	Students' interest in group work	9	90
Total score		44	73.33

Table 2. Observation checklist in the final period

No	Content	Grade	%
1	Students listen carefully to the teacher's instructions	10	100
2	Students take the initiative in all activities	8	80
3	Students try to express themselves when they answer teacher	8	80
4	Students make questions to get more specific information	7	70
5	Students have positive behaviors in engaging in activities	10	100
6	Students' interest in group work	10	100
Total		53	88.33

Table 3 reports the students' pre-test scores and post-test scores.

Table 3. *The result of students' score in 2 tests*

No	Pre-test score	Post-test score
1	80	95
2	60	80
3	85	95
4	85	95
5	75	80
6	45	70
7	50	75
8	75	95
9	80	85
10	60	55
11	85	85
12	65	75
13	75	90
14	55	65
15	80	95
16	65	80
17	75	95
18	60	80
19	Absent	80
20	85	95
21	Absent	85
22	45	70
23	80	95
24	75	95
25	65	75
26	70	95
27	65	85
28	95	absent
29	55	50
30	75	95
31	60	85
32	85	95
33	50	absent
34	85	95
35	50	70
Total score	2270	2755
Mean	68.78	83.48

As shown in table 3, the lowest score of the post-test is 50 and that of the pretest score is 45. The highest score for both tests is 95. The average score of the first test is 68.78 and the percentage of students who passed the test is 74.28%. In the second test, the students' average score is 83.48 and the percentage of students who passed the test is 88.57%. It means that the level of students' pronunciation were relatively low at the first period. Through the whole process, students

showed their significant improvement via scores from pre-cycle to the last cycle. They step by step mastered their pronunciations.

The students' post-test score is 14.29% higher than the students' pre-test score. It means that tongue twister technique was completely effective in improving students' pronunciation.

5. Conclusion

In short, the researcher has solved the 2 problems in this research on the first-year English major of Thai Nguyen University of Education in the academic year of 2019-2020:

- Tongue twister technique is highly appreciated by students in the class and received positive comments. The result of questionnaire showed that most of the students in the class recognize that tongue twister helps them overcome the fear and shyness, and be more active in learning process with the technique. Only few students did not acknowledge the effectiveness of learning pronunciation through tongue twister. Students had a significant improvement after experiencing tongue twister technique based on the post-test score.
- The implementation of tongue twister technique in teaching pronunciation could be used in combination with many activities such as whisper tongue twister and chain reading tongue twister.

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