
The effectiveness of pronunciation activities on teaching phonetics in different age groups

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As English teachers, we are always on the lookout for new and interesting ways to stimulate our language learners. The basic teaching is needed. Teaching the alphabets and the formation of the words is essential and a must. However, something is even more important.

Teaching pronunciation is often neglected or ignored in English language. Nevertheless, correct pronunciation is without doubt a fundamental feature of successful communication in the English language. For this reason, attention should be paid to teaching pronunciation right from the beginning of English language teaching. However, different age groups learners require different approaches, techniques, and these are addressed in this paper.

It is important for teachers to realize that they do not 'teach' spelling as such, but rather equip the learner with a number of strategies they can use to help them with their spelling. Many students believe that English spelling has no structure. However, it is important to point out to learners that many words do follow a pattern.

Pronunciation and spelling play significant role in daily communication and educational process. In spite of its importance, pronunciation has long been the neglected speaking skill in second acquisition, research, teaching and assessment. However, in recent years there has been an increased focus on the foreign language correct pronunciation or spelling ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and teaching.

As A. Brown notes, there is a common assumption among teachers that perceptual and productive language skills such as listening and speaking are taught through the same medium, namely speaking and listening. As the result, many of them use the traditional listen-and-repeat approach in spite of the present tendency for communicative language teaching. Techniques based on this method are often production oriented and aim at improving students' spoken English. Many of such techniques employ minimal pairs, which are words that have different meaning and their pronunciation differs only in one sound.

The phoneticians, also teachers specifically advocated the following notions and practices:

- (1) The spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first.
- (2) The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
- (3) Teachers must have solid training in phonetics.
- (4) Learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

English pronunciation is very difficult for foreign learners and it is due to the fact that spelling and pronunciation are two different matters. On the top of it, speech sounds of English are unlikely to be identical to the speech sounds of the mother tongue of the learners.

According to Gilakjani those who start learning English after their school years have greater difficulties in acquiring intelligible pronunciation and the degree of difficulty increases with age. However, Králová claims that learners of any age are able to create additional phonetic categories for new language sounds which do not correspond to the mother tongue sounds. The fact is that there are learners of English at all ages and that teaching pronunciation should not be concerning only children but also

adults.

Role of teaching pronunciation in schools is very unfavourable next to teaching grammar or vocabulary. This is a problem of English teaching in many countries. The following is a fairly comprehensive list on teaching pronunciation in different age groups:

- Listen and imitate: This technique has been enhanced by the use of tape recorders, language labs, and video recorders.
- Phonetic training: Use of articulatory descriptions, articulatory diagrams, and a phonetic alphabet, which may involve doing phonetic transcription as well as reading phonetically transcribed text.
- Minimal pair drills: Minimal pair drills typically begin with word-level drills and then move on to sentence-level drills, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic.
- Contextualized minimal pairs: In this technique, the teacher establishes the setting (e.g., a blacksmith shoeing a horse) and presents key vocabulary; students are then trained to respond to a sentence stem with the appropriate meaningful response.
- Visual aids: Enhancement of the teacher's description of how sounds are produced by audiovisual aids such as sound-color charts, wall charts, rods, pictures, mirrors, props, realia, etc.
- Tongue twisters: A technique from speech correction strategies for native speakers, e.g., "She sells seashells by the seashore."
- Developmental approximation drills: Just as children learning English often acquire /w/ before /r/ or /y/ before /l/, adults who have difficulty producing /l/ or /r/ can be encouraged to begin by pronouncing words with initial /w/ or /y/, and then shift to /r/ or /l/, respectively.
- Practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation: The teacher points out the rule-based nature of vowel and stress shifts in etymologically related words to raise awareness as oral practice material.
- Reading aloud/recitation: Passages or scripts for learners to practice and then read aloud, focusing on stress, timing, and intonation.
- Recordings of learners' production: Audio- and videotapes of rehearsed and spontaneous speeches, free conversations, and role-plays. Subsequent playback offers opportunities for feedback from teachers and peers as well as for teacher, peer, and self-evaluation.

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