



**CHOOSING APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE THE  
PRONUNCIATION SKILLS OF THE ENGLISH LEARNERS**

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**Abstract:** English may be one of the most difficult languages in the world to pronounce. Therefore, in my opinion, teaching ESL students English Pronunciation from the young age should be treated equally with Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. Learning the basics of pronunciation through Phonics, pupils will not only learn to speak comfortably, but also will improve their Listening Comprehension. That is, when pupils can pronounce “Tree” and “Three”, it will be easier to “hear” the difference when someone says these words to them.

**Keywords:** difficult languages, listening comprehension, teaching, pronunciation, ESL.

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At the same time, Pronunciation is important to improve Reading ability. When we read, we say the words “out loud” in our minds. Unfortunately, English consists of many words that look the same but are pronounced differently and have different meanings. So, learning these differences will help the ESL student learn to read better.

The teaching of pronunciation in Second Language classes has become an important element in order to achieve an intelligible communication and to improve children’ oral competences. Most of the English teachers and Non-native English Teachers (from now on NNETs) overlook pronunciation as they focus their teaching in other English areas, which are deemed to be more important.

Instruction According to Harmer, a lot of teachers do not pay enough attention to English pronunciation. There are different reasons for this negligence. Many learners state that they do not need to learn pronunciation and learning pronunciation is a waste of time. They state that just communication in English is enough and when they are understood, nothing else is important. Harmer emphasized that the main aim of teaching and learning in any language is to enable students to communicate in the target language and if this is the case, communication is an important term to explain. Communication means to understand and be understood.

There are a lot of useful suggestions for EFL teachers to help learners improve their English pronunciation. EFL teachers should be accurately trained in pronunciation to improve their learners' English pronunciation. EFL teachers should speak clearly and slowly in their pronunciation classes and they should convince their learners that their language is understandable. This can help their learners improve their pronunciation by listening to them carefully<sup>1</sup>. Teachers should teach their learners that slow speech with correct pronunciation is much better than fast speech with wrong pronunciation. Learners should understand that understandability is more important than fast speech<sup>2</sup>. EFL teachers should be aware of their learners' needs and problems in pronunciation. Based on their needs, teachers should present some appropriate materials to their learners to reduce their learners' pronunciation problems. Teachers should use computer technologies such as different kinds of computer software in their classes to help their learners improve their pronunciation by exposing them to authentic materials. Teachers should familiarize their learners to both American and British English and learners should be able to understand both varieties of pronunciation. Teachers should incorporate pronunciation in other language activities because it will help learners to adapt themselves to the sound systems of a new language and overcome their affective problems related to the learning of English language. Teachers

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley-Bennett, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, 2010

should set obtainable goals that are appropriate for the communication needs of the learners. Teachers should act as the speech coach of pronunciation, give feedback to their learners, and encourage them to improve their pronunciation.

As it is important to identify these differences in our learners, the following is a short overview of the intelligences as presented by Gardner in his book *Frameworks of Mind*.

### ***Linguistic Intelligence***

Language, being a product of the vocal tract and received by the human ear, is, at many levels, essential for human beings. Linguistic Intelligence describes one's sensitivity for syntax, grammar, and pronunciation of language, as well as his ability to produce exceptional texts. Learners with linguistic intelligence prefer writing and reading, and storytelling is a very suitable activity for them.

### ***Musical Intelligence***

Music, usually being an integral part of human life since birth, and sometimes even earlier, cultivates the ability to recognize melodies, rhythms, etc. Children are surrounded by music at home and (pre)school, and learners with highly develop musical intelligence enjoy singing and listening to songs, and they are also quick to pick up the correct pronunciation of individual phonemes and intonation patterns. ***Logical-Mathematical Intelligence***

As the name suggests, this intelligence enables learners to calculate, do mathematical operations, think logically, and understand abstract concepts sooner and better than other learners. These learners like the study of grammar and enjoy playing strategy games, and will always approach the study of language analytically. ***Spatial Intelligence***

The ability to see, visualize, and think in three dimensions. These children accurately perceive the world around them and are able to transform these perceptions. Spatially intelligent learners enjoy arts and crafts activities, various puzzles, and drawing is their welcomed assignment.

### ***Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence***

This intelligence is demonstrated by the ability to control the body by the mind in order to perform all physical tasks perfectly. The learner will enjoy dancing, practical tasks with tools, such as scissors, and other hands-on activities.

### ***Personal Intelligences***

Gardner divides personal intelligences into two subtypes: Intra-personal and Interpersonal. An intra-personal child understands his state of mind and uses the knowledge for directing himself. Such a learner can be shy in a group of other pupils and try to avoid cooperation with others, but on the other hand, he excels at self-reflection and is very independent. An interpersonal child, to the contrary, is empathetic, successfully interacts with other learners, and excels at verbal and nonverbal communication. This type of learner enjoys group activities and assignments. Even though Gardner's Theory has been criticized by some authors, for example, Willingham, who argue that Gardner's definitions are too vague and his set of intelligences simply represents various talents and personal traits, the theory has been very influential and many teachers use it in the classroom. All in all, for a language teacher, it is not important whether the intelligences are perfectly defined and scientifically verifiable, but the practical inference that every learner is different, and the teacher should not make him do things that are in conflict with his inner-self.

### ***Learning Styles***

Having introduced the learner's uniqueness, the concept of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles suggested by Barbe in 1979 explains how a child's possession of different intelligences influences the way he learns new things.

### ***Visual Learning***

Visual learners connect information with its visual representation, such as graphs, written texts, or images). They prefer reading to listening, like colour coding, and might struggle with verbal instructions; on-line texts, various computer programmes, and educational CD-ROMs can help stimulate these learners as Lojdová and Vlčková (2011) recommend.

### ***Auditory Learning***

Auditory learners attach information to the vocalized depiction. They need sounds and prefer learning through listening and speaking. It means they choose a lecture with the possibility of a discussion over studying a text in a quiet library.

### ***Kinesthetic Learning***

Kinesthetic learners are easily identifiable in the traditional classroom. They have trouble sitting still at their desks as they need movement for processing information. They like art and drama classes/activities, and young learners are the first to participate in total body response activities. Lojdová and Vlčková endorse using real objects and allowing free movement with these learners. It is important to note that usually, learners perceive information using more than one learning strategy. They can be balanced or one can be dominant. It is therefore vital that teachers use various teaching techniques so that every learner can receive the information through the favored channel, for example, when giving instruction, the teacher should visualize, vocalize, and demonstrate them.

There is a long list of activities that the teacher can use in the classroom. All these activities serve the purpose of increasing the language level of the learner by developing his grasp of language skills. Given the cognitive state of the young learner, the teacher should start with teaching listening and speaking. Pinter points out that this is a natural order of learning the mother tongue. There are also other reasons for employing reading and writing later, for example, the young learner at the beginning of his formal education cannot usually read and write, and even if he could, the pace would be really slow, and the time could be used more efficiently for other activities. Read suggests a list of activities that help the learner to improve his skills. Those with the greatest potential are storytelling and drama, games, and rhymes, chants, and songs.

## ***Storytelling***

The young learner usually knows the concept of a story, typically a fairy tale, and therefore it is relatively easy for him to explore similar stories in a foreign language. It is understandable that the auditory input would not be enough. The teacher should always help the learner relate to the story and its characters with other aids, for example, flash cards or gestures. Another important factor is the modification of the language. The teacher always has to remember Krashen's Input hypothesis and adjust the language to the learner. The procedure of storytelling in a story-based lesson or sequence, as suggested by Read (ibid.) includes choosing stories, telling stories, and "after" activities. Choosing a story is the key to a successful sequence.

The teacher should use familiar stories until the young learner's language competences are more developed. Telling a story is the key part as it is the time when the learner is exposed to the target language. The teacher must employ various strategies, for example using flash cards or using various voices for different characters, to maintain the learner's concentration and attention. "After" activities can include listening comprehension using worksheets or, with older learners, retelling the story as practicing speaking<sup>3</sup>.

## ***Games***

Games are frequently used in the primary classroom not only in foreign language teaching but also in other subjects as they help the learner develop his "social, cognitive and language skills" (Read, ibid.). For a young child, the world, including school, is one big adventure, and games are its integral part. Nevertheless, including game-like activities into the lesson plan always requires a sensitive approach, and the teacher must carefully minimize the negative effects of the game, such as its competitiveness. The fundamental part of preparing a game-

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<sup>3</sup> Paulston, C. B., & Burder, M. N. (1976). *Teaching English as a Second Language. Techniques and Procedures*. Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers, Inc.

like activity is a selection and adaptation of a suitable game. Read (ibid.) suggest addressing various possible negative aspects of using a game, such as the loss of the right to participate when one loses, during the preparatory stage. This secures maintaining several aspects of learning such as motivation. When using a game, the teacher should always know the goal that he wants to achieve; for example, when using a memory game, the learner practices vocabulary, or when using a total-body response game, the teacher addresses the needs of kinesthetic learners.

### ***Rhymes, chants and songs***

Every child likes to sing, and music is something that accompanies him from his early years. The first songs are lullabies sang by parents, the next step are rhymes and chants that help him explore the world. Using songs and chants in foreign language learning is irreplaceable in teaching/learning pronunciation as will be discussed in one of the following subsections. Using songs and chants helps to develop numerous skills, such as turn-taking and motor skills, and support progress and reinforcement of knowledge across the curriculum as Read (ibid.) notes.

Ellis and Brewster state that songs, rhymes, and chants are considered fun for children and will make them view the target language positively. There are many challenges in teaching children, such as classroom management. However, through using songs, they will be more enthusiastic in studying a new language that they never speak with or hear. Moreover, one of the many benefits of teaching using songs for pronunciation is the familiarization of the target culture<sup>4</sup>. This familiarization makes it possible for children to enjoy the new and foreign language that they are learning. From this enjoyment, as stated by Millington cited previously, children will be interested in learning. As long as the children are interested, the teachers may teach them the materials that they need to master a foreign language, including teaching them pronunciation. This is the reason why

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<sup>4</sup> Dian Palupi, Evi T. Prasetyaningsih, Sayyidah Bilandari; Improving Young Learners' Pronunciation Skill through Songs



using songs is one of the alternatives to practice pronunciation. Many studies argue that songs can stimulate children into learning English and that songs make learning a second language easier for the students. All in all, songs can help the students learn a new language because the students' learning process becomes unconscious. The students will learn without feeling the burden of learning that students often face, which means that their anxiety level is lower. According to Liu, the more proficient students are in an FL, the less anxious they tend to be. Thus, there will be an increase in their academic performance.

So, In my view, Pronunciation should be viewed as an important part of communication that is incorporated into classroom activities. Learning styles have been studied for decades and there are several models that have been proposed by various researchers. While the finer distinctions are still debated, most authorities in the field generally agree upon four basic learning styles: auditory learners, visual learners, kinesthetic learners, and tactile learners. There is a great deal of overlap between the kinesthetic and tactile learning styles, and they will be treated together here.

Teachers can urge their learners to monitor their own pronunciation and practice their speaking skills as much as possible in and outside the classroom. Understandable pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence. With this in mind, teachers should set obtainable goals that are applicable and suitable for the communication needs of learners. Moreover, Pronunciation instruction has to aim at intelligible pronunciation and teachers can actively encourage their learners' actual production, build pronunciation awareness and practice. Pronunciation instruction is very important because it is the main source of understanding. If learners cannot utter the correct version of a word then they are not able to communicate correctly. Pronunciation instruction helps learners to have a better understanding of native speakers and improves their ability to communicate easily and effectively.

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