

USE OF FILM AND PODCASTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO ESL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The single-group pretest-posttest study looked into the use of film and podcasts as supplementary tools in teaching pronunciation and their effect on the oral production of ESL students. Data collected from forty (40) freshmen students taking Speech Communication classes through an accent inventory and pilot-tested table of equivalent error scores revealed mean scores that showed a significant difference in the students' English oral production, indicating that the students improved after the intervention. Sex held no significant difference; however, despite the introduction of film and audio exercises, many students repeatedly interchanged the vowels /i/ with /I/ and /E/ while for the consonants, the /ʒ/ sound posed the most challenge prior to and even after the intervention.

Keywords: *technology in teaching, teaching English oral production, teaching Speech, film in the classroom, audio*

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INTRODUCTION

The basis of all language is sound. Words are merely combinations of sounds, and the printed page is a graphic representation of sound sequences. It is in these sound sequences that the ideas are contained (Huebner, 1969).

For a second language learner of English, one of the most difficult terrains to navigate is the correct production of its sound. Rajadurai (2001) stresses that pronunciation has often been viewed as a skill in second language learning that is more resistant to improvement and therefore the least useful to teach. The result of her investigation showed that in the Malaysian school curriculum, scant attention is paid to pronunciation.

The present study is anchored on Stephen Krashen's comprehensible input theory. He elucidates that, "The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production." (Schütz, 2007).

In teaching pronunciation, carefully selected instructional materials play a major role. Fillmore and Snow (2000, in Clair, 2000) suggest that teachers must select education materials and provide learning opportunities that promote second language acquisition for students who are learning English. This is supported by Sutaria's (1995) claim that if an educational technology employed in the classroom can make the learners actively involved in their own learning through interaction with the teacher, other learners, with the technological software and hardware and their environment, then it can produce optimal learning. Kemp et al. (1994) also advances the idea that most successful teaching/learning activities rely on the use of appropriate instructional resources.

Innovative technologies and media are frequently cited as a way to increase access to information and entertainment in a foreign language, provide interaction with speakers of other languages, and improve foreign language teaching in the classroom. In smaller countries, many of the television shows or popular music are broadcast in a foreign language, with TV shows subtitled than dubbed. In Denmark, for instance, where English is omnipresent through the many U.S. and British television programs, films, computer games,

and music videos, teachers, rather than dismissing these texts as 'trash', have developed successful strategies for integrating their students' informal language exposure into their classroom teaching (Pufahl, 2001).

Television is considered an indispensable tool in supplementing classroom activities. Giorgis and Johnson (1999 in Cornel, 2001) observe that since students encounter visual images and audio-materials in their daily lives and that they are required to constantly use and interpret these images and sounds as well as analyse and think critically about the significance of what they see and hear, the film and television are valuable materials in training and preparing them to perform their learning task.

Insofar as realism is the dominant style of a film, its language approximates language use in real life, thereby demonstrating practical application. Vocabulary and listening-comprehension are not the only skills improved by watching films. Subtitles and closed captioning (dialogue and other sound information printed across the bottom of the frame) can help students increase reading speed. Films can also serve as the basis for writing assignments and oral presentations, especially when they are combined with the diverse film resources now readily accessible on the Internet. In short, films provide an invaluable extension of what we might call the technologies of language acquisition that have been used to teach students the basics of English in elementary and high school. But films can do more than this. Properly selected and presented, films can do what is perhaps most difficult in university language teaching: move students to speak (Stewart, 2006). Ruusunen (2011) likewise finds movies as a versatile tool for foreign language teaching that can be used in several different ways when teaching the different aspects of a foreign language.

Aside from films, podcasts and other audio materials are also gaining popularity as alternative ways to create interactive and authentic language learning in the English classroom. Podcasts are readily available from the internet and may be downloaded for free. This affords teachers versatility in using this type of technology. It is relatively easy to use when downloaded into an MP3 player and played in the classroom. Fox (2008) observes that podcasts meet the need for oral activities that are often otherwise neglected in the EFL classroom. Teachers may not realize that using podcasts actively can start in a low risk way that can be developed further if students show an interest. Talk radio podcasts offer the pedagogical potential for varying

degrees of involvement in interaction and proffer student engagement that promotes effective and deep learning according to currently accepted cognitive theories.

Without a native speaker in person available for the students to follow, perhaps the better way to teach them to listen to a native speaker's sounds is through television and/or podcasts. News broadcast, documentaries, advertisements and the like, utilize the best example of a native speaker talking for students to listen and follow. Furthermore, Bello (1999) and Stempleski (1992) in Burt (1999) advances that for English language learners, video has the added benefit of providing real language and cultural information. Video can be controlled (stopped, paused, repeated), and it can be presented to a group of students, to individuals, or for self-study. It allows learners to see facial expressions and body language at the same time as they hear the stress, intonation, and rhythm of the language.

The positive use of the aforementioned technology in the classroom may have advantages and disadvantages but going back to the observations of researchers and language teachers, the success of students in an EFL/ESL classroom depends on the teacher's careful selection of technology to supplement specifically, effective enhancement of students' speaking skills and language learning in general.

METHOD

Forty (40) students taking up Speech Communication class were involved in the study. The class was selected through convenience sampling. The group was made up of fourteen (14=35%) male and twenty-six (26=65%) female students.

To gather the data, Prator's Accent Inventory and a pilot-tested table of equivalent error score that contained the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) phonemes were used. Each phoneme was represented by a word or several words that contain the phoneme being tested. The students involved in the study were made to read the passage from Prator's Accent Inventory as a pretest. This was recorded for assessment. Errors such as substitution, addition, and omission were given their respective equivalent error scores. Based on the highest and lowest scores of the students, a scale was made as basis of their performance.

Two Speech Communication instructors served as inter-raters who listened to the recorded readings of the students.

The scoring procedure involved assigning a point to a certain test word. For example, in the phoneme /I/, there were four test words. Each test word was given its corresponding point. For one item, one point was divided by the number of test word/s. If a certain phoneme, for example, contained one test word, this word received one (1) point. If it contained two words, each word was given a .50 score; for three words, a .33 score, and so on. The experiment totalled thirty (30) hours with one hour and thirty minutes per session.

During the intervention, the students were taught in part using the traditional audio-lingual method with the teacher modelling the sounds. Half of the class time was spent using selected parts of an American film for students to watch and an audio recording to listen to. During or after watching part of the film and listening to audio recordings, carefully selected activities involved writing down words that belong to a target sound, identifying words that belonged to a target sound and using the same in sentences for oral reading, presenting short role plays using the identified words of a target sound, etc.

For the posttest, the students were made to read the same passage from Prator's Accent Inventory.

RESULTS

Students' Oral Production Before the Intervention

The data in Table 1 present the performance in oral production of the students before the intervention. Prior to the intervention, the students generally received an 'Excellent' rating ($\underline{M}=33.73$, $\underline{SD}=1.38$). Males performed with an 'Excellent' rating ($\underline{M}=33.65$, $\underline{SD}=1.68$) while females showed the same performance ($\underline{M}=33.74$, $\underline{SD}=1.22$).

Table 1
Students' Oral Production Before Intervention

Category	Mean	Description	SD
A. Entire Group	33.73	Excellent	1.38
B. Sex			
Male	33.65	Excellent	1.68
Female	33.74	Excellent	1.22

Students' Oral Production After the Intervention

After the intervention, the students generally received an 'Excellent' rating (\underline{M} =35.85, \underline{SD} =1.27). Males performed with an 'Excellent' rating (\underline{M} =35.44, \underline{SD} =1.49) while the females did the same (\underline{M} =36.07, \underline{SD} =1.10). Table 2 presents the data.

Table 2
Students' Oral Production Before Intervention

Category	Mean	Description	SD
A. Entire Group	35.85	Excellent	1.27
B. Sex			
Male	35.44	Excellent	1.49
Female	36.07	Excellent	1.10

t-test for Correlated Means for Differences in the Performance in Oral Production of Segmental Phonemes When Students were Classified as an Entire Group Before and After the Intervention

The t-test for correlated means shows that there was a significant difference in the performance of the students in oral production of English segmental phonemes before and after they were introduced to films and audio recordings as a supplementary tool, $t(39) = 14.30$, $p < .05$. Their means indicate that the students improved after the intervention. Table 3 shows the data.

Table 3
Differences in the Performance in Oral Production of Segmental Phonemes as an Entire Group Before and After the Intervention

Treatment Period	Mean	t-value	df	Significance 2-tailed
Pre Intervention	33.73			
Post Intervention	35.85	14.02*	39	.00

* $p < .05$ - significant

t-test for Dependent Variables for Differences in the Oral Production of Segmental Phonemes When Students were Classified as to Sex Before and After the Intervention

In Table 4, the t-test for dependent variables shows that there was no significant difference in the oral production performance of the students before the intervention when they were grouped according to sex, $t(38)=.11$, $p>.05$. This means that both male and female students showed the same level of performance before the intervention. Furthermore, results show that after the introduction of the intervention, there was no significant difference in the oral production of the students when they were grouped according to sex, $t(38)=1.51$, $p>.05$. The result indicates equal progress in both sexes.

Table 4
Differences in the Oral Production of Segmental Phonemes According to Sex

Category	Mean	t-value	df	Significance 2-tailed
Pre Intervention				
Male	33.69	.11	38	.91
Female	33.74			
Post Intervention				
Male	35.44	1.51	38	.14
Female	36.07			

* $p<.05$ - significant

DISCUSSION

Clearly, given more time, the use of film and audio recordings to teach pronunciation and speaking skills among students presents endless possibilities for better learning in any ESL or EFL classroom. The potential use of these technologies may also enhance other skills and as such, warrants deeper investigation.

It should be noted though that despite the significant difference found before and after the intervention, students continually interchanged /i/ with /I/ and /E/. The students' difficulty with the /ʒ/ sound could stem from the fact that this sound is not found in their first language. Furthermore, because the study was done in a 30-hour period, less time was allotted to

emphasize on this specific sound. Similarly, in a study conducted by Ducate, L. and Lomicka, L. (2009) on the effects of using podcasts to improve pronunciation in second language learning, students' pronunciation did not significantly improve in regard to accentedness or comprehensibility because they have observed that the 16-week long treatment was too short to foster significant improvement and there was no in-class pronunciation practice. The podcast project, however, was perceived positively by students, and they appreciated the feedback given for each scripted recording and enjoyed opportunities for creativity during extemporaneous podcasts.

The students' 'Excellent' performance in English oral production shows that they may have sufficient articulatory skills but results indicate that this may be improved upon with the right motivation and choice of technology as a supplementary tool in teaching English oral production. The right tool, carefully selected by the ESL teacher, could thus increase learning opportunities that could heighten students' comprehensibility level. However, the fact that some teachers are hesitant to use technology in the ESL classroom cannot be discounted. Warren (2005) notes that if one were to ask English teachers why they do not use ICT routinely as part of their lessons, most do not reply that they feel technically incompetent. Instead, they cite inadequate access to equipment. With access restricted, sporadic or inadequate, it seems difficult to get the most out of such a resource. Warren's observation merits attention from school administrators. Teachers may be enthusiastic to use technology in their EFL/ESL classes but the right support from administrators go a long way to ensure both teachers' and student's success in language learning.

The study used a heterogeneous class thereby limiting it to a single-group pretest-posttest design; replication of the study using another group for match-pairing involving a longer time for intervention may perhaps yield more substantial results.

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