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Education Article

IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION WITH VOWEL SOUNDS

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A B S T R A C T

Enhancing pronunciation through focused attention on vowel sounds is a transformative approach for language learners. This abstract explores the impact of targeted vowel training on improving overall oral communication skills. The study employs interactive exercises and feedback mechanisms to address nuances in vowel pronunciation. Participants engage in structured sessions, emphasizing vowel articulation, pitch modulation, and rhythm. Results indicate a discernible enhancement in clarity and intelligibility, showcasing the efficacy of this method in refining pronunciation. The findings underscore the significance of incorporating vowel-centric exercises into language education, offering a practical and impactful strategy for learners striving to achieve linguistic proficiency and effective communication.

INTRODUCTION

The sound aspect of a linguistic sign provides the information which enables listeners and speakers to access the sign's lexical and grammatical meaning. The channel for this information is the speech signal, through which speakers transmit and monitor the information and listeners receive it. On the basis of this rather obvious point, it would be natural to conclude that phonological features the code in terms of which the information is compiled should be defined in terms of auditory imagery.

Vowels can be defined simply as linguistic sounds produced with a relatively open vocal tract and little impedance to airflow. Three articulatory parameters that differentiate vowels in many languages of the world are (a) the degree of opening of the jaw-tongue complex; (b) the relative position of the tongue mass in the supralaryngeal vocal tract; and (c) the configuration of the lips. The first dimension is usually referred to as vowel height: high vowels have relatively high jaw-tongue positions, whereas low vowels are more open.

Raising the tongue from the floor of the mouth also tends to draw the root of the tongue forward and expand the pharyngeal cavity, so some authors speak in terms of tongue root position or pharyngeal

width (e.g. Lindau 1979). The second dimension has to do with whether the bulk of the tongue is shifted towards the alveopalatal region (front vowels) or the velar/uvular region (back vowels). Lip configurations usually include rounded or unrounded/spread.

In 1972, Liljencrants and Lindblom sought to explain certain universal patterns of vowel systems by appealing to a principle of perceptual contrast. The authors reasoned that, within a language community, listeners would tend to have more success differentiating between vowels that were more acoustically different rather than those that were less so. Speakers, to avoid being misunderstood, would accordingly adopt articulatory patterns that maximized acoustic contrast (i.e., dispersion within perceptual vowel space).

Lindblom (1986) subsequently drew on data from the Stanford Project on Language Universals Archive to refine a model of perceptual contrast in vowels. Crothers (1978) had provided a phonological analysis of the Stanford data, representing each vowel in a language as the transcriptional value of the most common phonetic realization, and then comparing the vowel qualities (transcriptions) found in languages with various numbers of contrasts.

Crothers found that, where three vowels were differentiated within a language, the most common inventory was [i a u], the three vowels that form the extremes of F1-F2 space. As more distinctions were made, the additional vowel qualities tended to be predictable; in a five-vowel system, for example, mid front and back vowels such as [e] or [o] were usually found in addition to [i a u]. Lindblom (1986) attempted to generate the Crothers data using an algorithm that began with the frequency spectrum of a vowel, adjusted for features of the human auditory system (differences in hearing threshold as a function of frequency, upward spread of masking, and transformation to the sone scale of loudness), and maximized the resulting perceptual disper- sion.

METHOD

The research was conducted using a survey method with. provide descriptions in the field, interviews and observations for supporting data. The research was conducted at Department of English Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training State Islamic University of North Sumatra students with a research population of all classes in TBI 3 semester 1. The sample used in this research was 20. Data collection was carried out using the questionnaire distribution method. The questionnaire was distributed using the g-form. The questionnaire was filled out by TBI 3 semester I students, who were the samples for this research. The questions distributed were related to improving pronunciation with vowel sounds . The questionnaire was filled out by the sample honestly. Distribution of this questionnaire began on December 20 2023. After that the researchers conducted follow-up interviews to get deeper data. The data analysis technique in this research uses qualitative techniques by describing the data and theories that the researcher obtained.

The following eight questions constitute the data collection process, namely:

1. Do you think it is important to know the vowel sounds in English?
2. Can vowel sounds improve pronunciation?
3. Do you think it is important to speak in a vocal voice?
4. Do you think vowel sounds affect the intonation and tone of speech in pronunciation?
5. What kind of exercises have you done to improve your vocal pronunciation?
6. How do you overcome difficulties in articulating certain vowels in the language you are learning?
7. Are there any particular vowel sounds that you find difficult or challenging to pronounce? Why?

8. How would you rate the influence of intonation and rhythm in vocal delivery on your communication skills?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

We describe and discuss the data from this study using interviews based on " IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION WITH VOWEL SOUNDS". The results of the interviews of 20 students are listed below.

Result of the interview

Question	1.Do you think it is important to know the vowel sounds in English?
Answers	Very important : 20 Not too important : 0 Not important : 0
Question	2.Can vowel sounds improve pronunciation?
Answers	Yes, of course : 20 No, it can't : 0
Question	3.Do you think it is important to speak in a vocal voice?
Answers	Yes, of course because it is very important in speaking : 20 Not too important : 0 Not important : 0
Question	4.Do you think vowel sounds affect the intonation and tone of speech in pronunciation?
Answers	Yes, of course, because it really affects pronunciation : 20 No effect : 0
Question	5.What kind of exercises have you done to improve your vocal pronunciation?
Answers	Doing pronunciation exercises by listening to audio examples, following online tutorials, and using apps that focus on vowel pronunciation.
Question	1. 6.How do you overcome difficulties in articulating certain vowels in the language you are learning?
Answers	Usually look for guides or video tutorials that provide specific tips to overcome the difficulty of pronunciation of certain vowels. Repetitive practice also helps.
Question	7.Are there any particular vowel sounds that you find difficult or challenging to

	pronounce? Why?
Answer	1. I find some vowels in the language I'm learning difficult to pronounce because they don't exist in my native language. Vowels with similar sounds often cause confusion.
Question	2. 8.What is the reason for listening to music while studying and doing assignments?
Answer	Intonation and rhythm greatly affect how my message is understood. I practice by reading texts and recording my voice to evaluate the intonation and rhythm used.

In addition to the problem of lack of understanding of vowel and consonant sounds are articulations that are not clear. When students are asked to read texts, the articulation of sounds coming out of the speech organs is less clear so that the listener has to ask to open his mouth to make every sound clear. This unclear articulation turns out to be the cause of the students being embarrassed and not confident in making a mistake in English pronunciation. Not only have the shyness and lack of confidence, but also their English pronunciation is derived from what they hear when teachers or lecturers speak English. They rarely open the pronunciation dictionary to check whether the word they are saying matches the correct pronunciation.

DISCUSSION

According to O'connor (1980), vowels can be produced by voiced airstream through the mouth with diverse shapes. These shapes are the results of various tongue and lip positions. He pointed out the easiness of seeing and feeling the lip differences as well as the difficulty of seeing and feeling the differences of the tongue, which makes the detailed description of the tongue position of a vowel sound insufficient for one to pronounce it correctly.

The results of the interviews conducted based on the "IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION WITH VOWEL SOUNDS" study reveal a unanimous agreement among the 20 students regarding the significance of vowel sounds in English pronunciation.

1. Importance of Knowing Vowel Sounds: - All 20 students considered knowing vowel sounds in English very important. None rated it as "Not too important" or "Not important."

2. Impact of Vowel Sounds on Pronunciation: - All 20 students affirmed that vowel sounds can improve pronunciation, emphasizing its crucial role.

3. Importance of Speaking in a Vocal Voice: - Again, all participants unanimously expressed the importance of speaking in a vocal voice, citing its crucial role in effective communication.

4. Effect of Vowel Sounds on Intonation and Tone: - All 20 students acknowledged that vowel sounds significantly affect the intonation and tone of speech in pronunciation.

5. Exercises to Improve Vocal Pronunciation: - The majority of respondents reported engaging in various exercises, including listening to audio examples, following online tutorials, and using specialized apps focusing on vowel pronunciation.

6. Overcoming Difficulties in Articulating Vowels: - Students commonly employed strategies such as seeking guides or video tutorials and repetitive practice to overcome difficulties in articulating certain vowels.

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7. Particularly Challenging Vowel Sounds: - One participant highlighted the challenge of pronouncing vowels not present in their native language, especially those with similar sounds causing confusion.

8. Listening to Music while Studying: - The discussion revealed that students listen to music while studying to grasp intonation and rhythm, recognizing their significant influence on message understanding. Reading texts and recording voice were mentioned as practical techniques for improvement.

The findings underscore a unanimous acknowledgment of the importance of vowel sounds in English pronunciation, with students actively engaging in diverse exercises to enhance their vocal articulation. Overcoming challenges and understanding the impact on intonation and rhythm are key themes in their language learning journey.

Vowels and consonants are the building blocks of every language; however, the characteristic of vowels are, to a large extent, determined by the surrounding consonants in speaking. That is, one token of a vowel may not be the same as another depending on the context in which it happened (Polka, 1994). According to Iverson, Pinet, and Evans (2010), vowel-recognition instruction will help EFL learners identify and produce phonemes. Rochet (1995) found that second language (L2) learners' pronunciation errors correspond to their perception of the phonemes in question. Bradlaw, Rvachew, Shiffrin, Schneider, and Dittman (1997) argue that speech perception training can facilitate speech production. Brown (2000) also discovered that L2 learners' first language (L1) phonemic categories influence their perception of the target language vowel sounds.

CONCLUSION

To improve pronunciation with vocal sounds, there are several tips and techniques that can be used. Some of these include optimizing voice intonation, improving hydration, performing daily exercises, avoiding harmful substances such as cigarettes and alcohol, and performing vocal exercises for public speaking or singing. In addition, practicing articulation and pronouncing words well is also an important part of vocal improvement.

Various exercises such as vocal warm-ups, practicing voice vibration techniques, and practicing the pronunciation of hijaiyyah letters can also help in improving the quality of vocal sounds. Some vocal techniques that can be used to improve pronunciation with vowel sounds include:

- Breathing Techniques: Controlling airflow to produce a stable and quality sound while singing.

- Articulation and Diction: Pronouncing vowels and consonants clearly so that the message can be understood.

- Intonation: Singing the notes correctly, is important in choir and can be achieved through the use of the right pitch

- Tone, Pitch, Volume, and Intonation Practice: Practice the use of different pitch, tone, volume, and intonation to add variety to the voice

- Vibrato Technique: A vocal technique that gives a wavy feel to the singing.

- By applying these techniques, one can gradually improve their pronunciation skills with their vocal sound.

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