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STRATEGY ENGLISH PHONOLOGY: TEACHING TO BEGINNER'S GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

Phonology is an important aspect of learning English as a foreign language, especially for beginners. Understanding the English sound system not only helps improve pronunciation, but also strengthens listening and speaking skills. However, many students experience difficulties due to the phonological differences between their native language and English. This article aims to present effective strategies in teaching phonology based on recent findings. The method used is a literature study by analyzing various relevant literature sources. The results show that strategic approaches such as the use of AI-based technology, minimal pair practice, articulation visualization, as well as providing continuous feedback can significantly improve students' phonological awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Phonology is a crucial aspect of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), especially for beginners. A proper understanding of the English sound system not only improves pronunciation, but also strengthens overall listening and speaking skills. However, many early learners have difficulty in distinguishing and producing sounds that are not present in their native language. Teaching English phonology to beginning learners is a challenge in the field of second language teaching. As the need for global communication increases, the ability to understand and produce the

sounds of English accurately becomes increasingly important (Derwing & Munro, 2021). However, many English language teachers still struggle with effective strategies to convey phonological aspects to beginning students who often have very different first language backgrounds. These challenges include sound segmentation, word stress, intonation, and phoneme differences that are not present in the students' native language (Thomson & Derwing, 2022).

Recent findings show that strategic approaches to teaching phonology can significantly improve learning outcomes. For example, the integration of AI-based technologies in pronunciation training and the implementation of phonological awareness-based approaches have been shown to accelerate students' phonetic development (Lee et al., 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2024). In addition, the utilization of modified phonological input, such as enhanced input or repeated practice with minimal pairs, has a positive impact on the perception and production of target sounds (Saito, 2023).

In recent years, strategic approaches in teaching English phonology have been the main focus of various studies in the field of applied linguistics. Recent studies emphasize the importance of phonology teaching that not only focuses on sound production, but also includes phonological awareness, auditory perception, and continuous practice with purposeful feedback (Saito, 2023). Strategy-based approaches, such as the use of minimal pairs, articulatory visualization, as well as AI-based learning technologies, have been shown to significantly improve students' pronunciation accuracy and phonological understanding (Zhang & Liu, 2024).

This article aims to present a practical guide based on current research in teaching English phonology to beginners. Combining modern phonological theories, empirical findings, and proven effective teaching practices, this guide is designed to help language teachers create phonological learning experiences that are strategic, systematic, and centered on students' needs.

METHOD

This research applies the library research method, which involves collecting and analyzing data from written sources such as books, academic journals, magazines, and reports available in the library. According to Prastowo (2016), library studies are data collection from various sources, not only books, but also documentary materials, magazines, newspapers, and others. To

strengthen this approach Effendy (2023) emphasizes that desk research allows researchers to build arguments and theoretical frameworks by critically analyzing previous research. Therefore, this study focuses on examining and synthesizing relevant literature to build a strong conceptual framework and provide a comprehensive understanding of the phonological strategies applicable in teaching beginner-level English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Phonology

Phonology is the branch of science that studies the sound system of a language. Every language has a unique sound system; some aspects may be similar between languages, but many are distinct. From infancy, humans begin to learn the sound system of their mother tongue, instinctively learning which sounds are important to pay attention to and which can be ignored, depending on the structure of the language they hear. In this sense, babies are arguably natural linguistic geniuses.

Phonology also helps us understand that not all sounds are present in all languages. For example, in a comparison between English and Dutch, there are sounds in Dutch that sound harsh or guttural to native English speakers. These sounds are not included in the English phonological system. While English speakers may be able to imitate these sounds, they usually don't pronounce them accurately because they are not part of their language system.

Also, two sounds that are considered different phonemes in one language may only be considered variations of one phoneme (called allophones) in another language. For example, in British English, vowel length is not used to distinguish word meaning, whereas in languages like Japanese and Hungarian, vowel length can be a factor in determining meaning. Phonology covers many other interesting aspects, but this is just an introduction.

Phonology is a fundamental branch of linguistics that examines the sound systems of languages. Each language possesses a unique set of phonemes, which are the distinct units of sound that can differentiate meaning. While some phonological features may be shared across languages, many others are unique, resulting in significant challenges for language learners, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The Importance of Phonology in Language Learning

Understanding phonology is essential for mastering pronunciation, which is crucial for effective communication. Research indicates that learners often struggle with sounds absent in their native language, leading to difficulties in both production and perception. For instance, English contains sounds such as /θ/ (as in "think") and /ð/ (as in "this"), which may be entirely foreign to speakers of languages that do not include similar phonemes. This phonemic gap can result in errors that impede intelligibility.

Challenges in Teaching Phonology to Beginners

Teaching phonology to beginners presents unique challenges. Many learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, each with its own sound system and phonological rules. As highlighted by Thomson and Derwing (2022), common difficulties include sound segmentation, word stress, and intonation patterns. Moreover, the influence of a learner's first language often leads to transfer errors, where they apply familiar phonological rules to English, resulting in mispronunciations or misunderstandings.

Strategic Approaches to Teaching Phonology

Recent studies emphasize the efficacy of strategic approaches in teaching phonology, which can significantly enhance learning outcomes. For example, the integration of technology, such as AI-based pronunciation training tools, offers personalized feedback and practice opportunities that adapt to individual learner needs (Lee et al., 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2024). Additionally, phonological awareness-based approaches, which focus on developing learners' understanding of sound patterns, have shown promise in improving both perception and production of English sounds.

The use of minimal pairs—words that differ by only one phoneme (e.g., "ship" and "sheep")—is another effective strategy. This method assists learners in honing their ability to differentiate similar sounds, which is particularly valuable for enhancing listening skills and pronunciation accuracy. Furthermore, incorporating articulatory visualization techniques, where learners see how sounds are produced, can deepen their understanding of the phonetic system.

The Role of Feedback in Phonological Learning

Continuous practice accompanied by purposeful feedback is essential for phonological development. Feedback can take various forms, including corrective feedback during speaking activities, peer assessments, and self-evaluation using recorded speech. Such strategies not only help learners identify and rectify errors but also foster a greater awareness of their phonological strengths and weaknesses.

In conclusion, phonology plays a critical role in the acquisition of English as a foreign language, particularly for beginners. The challenges posed by differing sound systems necessitate the implementation of strategic teaching approaches that leverage current research findings. By adopting methods such as minimal pairs, AI-based training, and providing continuous feedback, educators can create a supportive learning environment that enhances students' phonological awareness and pronunciation skills. This strategic framework not only addresses the immediate needs of learners but also equips them with the essential skills for effective communication in English.

Key Strategies of Phonology for Beginners

Phonology is the study of language sound systems can be difficult. Nonetheless, a number of useful techniques can support students in gaining a good phonological awareness and proficiency. The fundamental techniques listed below are backed by both research and classroom experience. The strategies include :

1. Read poems and stories that rhyme.

By reading several rhyming stories and poems to your child, you may start teaching them rhymes. You can start highlighting the rhyme's sounds as you read. You may remark, for instance, "I hear rhyming phrases! "Dog and Bog rhyme!" Asking your youngster to guess the next word in the rhymed tale is another option. Say something like, "The cat sat on the..." and let your youngster fill in the rest. Make sure to emphasize the sounds of the rhymes when you read books and poetry to your youngster. Make sure to highlight the rhyme.

Some examples of rhyming books are *Llama Llama Red Pajama*, *Jamberry*, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, *Sheep in a Jeep*, etc.

2. Sing Rhyming Songs and Rhyming Chants

Engage your youngster in a lot of rhyming songs and chants. Since you may essentially start singing or chanting at any time of day, singing is quite easy to include into your daily routine.

Black Sheep, I Know an Old Lady, Down By the Bay, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Five Little Monkeys, and Baa, Baa are a few examples of rhyming songs and chants.

3. Rhyming Practice

After introducing rhymes, you can help your child identify and practice rhymes by manipulating sounds in words. Examples include:

- "Tell me words that rhyme with 'cat'."
- "Close your eyes. I'll say two words. Raise your hand if they rhyme, shake your head if they don't."
- "Say 'cat', then change the /c/ to /b/. Cat and bat rhyme!"
- "Which word doesn't rhyme: mop, plop, or tag?"

4. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies were the least used by students learning Phonology. Although some students reported difficulty memorizing phonetic transcriptions, it wasn't that they didn't use memory strategies, but rather they were unaware of how often they employed them. This aligns with Oxford's (1990) statement that while memory strategies can be powerful language learning tools, students often underreport their use. It's possible students aren't using them actively or aren't aware of their frequent use.

5. Cognitive Strategies

This study reveals that cognitive strategies are the most frequently used by students learning Phonology, accounting for 25.8% of the strategies employed. Encourage learners to watch videos, listen to native speakers, and interact with others to hear and practice different sounds in context. This finding aligns with Oxford's (1990) assertion that cognitive strategies are typically favored by language learners. Students utilized various cognitive strategies including:

- Grouping and note-taking
- Summarizing and self-talk
- Resourcing and inferencing
- Contextualization and auditory representation

6. Use Assessment to Guide your Instruction

Using an assessment tool can help to screen the students and identify those who may need extra support, monitor their progress, and tailor your instruction to establish instructional priorities. As your students become adept at working with larger units of speech such as identifying individual words in sentences, clapping syllables within words, or dividing words into onset-rime, you can then progress to tasks that involve working with the phonemes in individual words.

7. Focus your instruction

For typically developing children, it may be more useful to focus on one or two types of phoneme manipulation (e.g., blending and segmenting), as studies have indicated that children who were taught only one or two types of manipulation, instead of three or more, learned faster. And in some cases, students made stronger gains in reading and spelling (NRP, 2000; Ryder et al., 2008). Kilpatrick (2015), however, advises that children who struggle with phonemic awareness, or who may be at risk for developing literacy difficulties; may benefit from programming that is more comprehensive and that includes a larger variety of tasks (i.e., programs that train students to manipulate, delete, and substitute phonemes rather than only to blend and segment phonemes).

8. Connect it to Letter-Sounds

Research tells us that phonemic awareness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for skilled decoding and spelling and that instruction that combines phonemic awareness with letter-sound instruction (phonics) produces steeper gains/superior outcomes than phonemic awareness instruction in isolation (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Schneider et al., 2000).

9. Teaching Irregular Words

Many common English words have irregular spelling patterns, and understanding the relationship between sounds and letters is crucial for efficient learning. To teach irregular words, follow this process:

- 1) Say the word aloud and have students repeat it.
- 2) Segment the word into phonemes.
- 3) Write lines to represent the graphemes needed.
- 4) Discuss expected letter patterns based on sound-letter associations.
- 5) Highlight the irregular part of the word.

Frame it for students by:

-Labelling letters that "aren't playing by the rules"

-Calling them "heart words" and highlighting irregular letters with a heart symbol, indicating the part that needs to be learned "by heart".

10. Pronunciation Drills and Phonemic Training

Repetitive exercises and targeted instruction designed to practice and reinforce specific pronunciation patterns, sounds, or phonemes, helping learners to develop accurate pronunciation skills.

11. Segmenting words

Segmenting words into phonemes, blending sounds, and rhyming practice. and visual imagery to enhance memory and comprehension. Dual coding combines both phonological and semantic approaches, utilizing sound and meaning to reinforce spelling and reading skills. These strategies can be effective in helping children with dyslexia develop stronger literacy skills.

12. Practicing Articulation

Using visual aids like diagrams and mirror techniques to observe and practice correct mouth and tongue positions for specific sounds.

13. Reinforcement Learning

This approach provides feedback to learners during pronunciation practice, indicating whether their pronunciation is correct or incorrect. This feedback helps learners adjust and improve their pronunciation over time.

14. Sound Substitution

Students replace challenging sounds with more familiar ones. While this can help with communication, it's a compensatory strategy that might not lead to perfect pronunciation.

15. Stress and Rhythm Practice

Students mark word stress patterns to practice natural-sounding speech. This involves identifying which syllables are emphasized, helping them develop a more authentic rhythm and flow in their pronunciation.

CONCLUSION

Teaching phonology in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning has a very important role, especially for beginner learners. Phonology is not only concerned with correct pronunciation, but also strengthens listening and speaking skills as a whole. However, challenges such as differences in sound systems between the native language and English, difficulties in sound segmentation, word stress, and intonation make phonology a complex aspect to teach. Recent studies have shown that strategic approaches to teaching phonology, such as the use of AI-based technology, minimal paired practice, articulation visualization, and continuous feedback, can improve students' phonological awareness and pronunciation accuracy. In addition, strategies such as reading rhyming poems, singing rhyming songs, rhyme identification exercises, and the application of cognitive and memory strategies have also proven effective in developing the phonological understanding of beginning students. The importance of formative assessment and teaching focused on one or two types of phoneme manipulation contributes greatly to learning achievement, especially when combined with phonics instruction (letter-sound connection). Equally important, the teaching of irregular words should also be done systematically so that students understand the relationship between sounds and letters in English. With a systematic, research-based and customized approach, teaching phonology can be more effective and provide a strong foundation for successful communication in English.

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