

STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION SKILLS IMPROVEMENT: PEER AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PRONUNCIATION

Summary. This article deals with the effectiveness of different approaches to improve pronunciation while learning English. The paper views activities for pronunciation self-practice and defines the benefits of peer and self-assessment of pronunciation. The importance of this article is provoked by the need to master one's pronunciation in the language learning process in order to become fluent and advanced user. The paper presents effective teaching strategies for enhancing pronunciation such as out-of-class activities with alternative assessment tasks. This paper describes the research conducted with the purpose to explore the effects of different pronunciation activities on students. The results of the research indicate that students have become more confident and motivated and improved their pronunciation skills.

Keywords pronunciation, teaching approach, language skills, peer assessment, self-assessment.

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ВДОСКОНАЛЕННЯ НАВИЧОК ВИМОВИ У СТУДЕНТІВ: ВЗАЄМНЕ ОЦІНЮВАННЯ ТА САМООЦІНЮВАННЯ ВИМОВИ

Анотація. Стаття присвячена дослідженню ефективності застосування різних методів удосконалення вимови в процесі вивчення англійської мови. У статті вивчаються види діяльності, які використовуються з метою самостійного вдосконалення вимови та визначаються переваги взаємного оцінювання та самооцінювання. Важливість статті визначається необхідністю засвоїти вимову в процесі вивчення мови для того, щоб вільно володіти мовою і досягати мовної досконалості. У статті описуються ефективні стратегії позакласної діяльності з альтернативним оцінюванням, які застосовуються для покращення вимови студентів; а також представлені результати емпіричного дослідження, проведеного з метою вивчення впливу різних видів діяльності на вдосконалення вимови студентів. У поданій статті представлені результати дослідження, проведеного з метою вивчення впливу різних видів діяльності на студентів. Результати експерименту засвідчили підвищення рівня впевненості та вмотивованості студентів і покращення їхньої вимови.

Ключові слова: вимова, методи навчання, мовні навички, взаємне оцінювання, самооцінювання.

Defining of the problem. Teaching English pronunciation is a complicated task for both teachers and students. Moreover, this task becomes more challenging with students of technical specialties who study English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where more attention is paid to the vocabulary and its practical usage in the context. In a classroom, there is not always enough time to focus on grammar, spelling and other language skills, such as reading, listening, speaking, writing, we don't speak about pronunciation. There is usually a lack of time to practice pronunciation, especially taking into consideration the fact that the students of technical specialties have only one English lesson per week and work in the large groups of 15-20 students. Today, it has become a real problem due to the reason that pronunciation and phonetics are neglected on English lessons starting from primary school and this sometimes hinders goals of communication and causes misunderstandings in conversation. Observing the focus group of students and taking into account their issues with pronouncing words properly it was decided to try different approaches for overcoming the problem. Pronunciation is an essential key for communicative competence which is the main purpose of foreign language studying, for expressing ideas clearly and properly and for listeners to understand the message.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The problem of pronunciation and ability to self-assess is not new. In the article 'Self-Assessment of Pronunciation', Dłaska A. and Krekeler C. state that it is difficult to self-assess one's pronunciation skills even for the experienced language learners [4, p. 506–516]. A great number of other scientists from different countries has published the scientific papers about the necessity to improve the learners' pronunciation in order to improve the communication skills, and presented some methods. For instance Nurani S., Rosyada A. offered the reading aloud assessments [8], Gerhiser A., Wrenn D. presented the handout packet for second language pronunciation assessment [6].

Previously unsolved parts of the problem and aims of the article. The objective of the present paper is to investigate and analyse the reliability and effectiveness of the versatile activities, which were followed by peer assessment and self-assessment and aimed at the upgrading technical specialty students' pronunciation skills. The paper provides an overview of modern and classic methods and strategies for enhancing pronunciation skills and describes the results of the conducted experiments.

The main material. In the study, two research methods were used (observation and experiment). During one academic year, the teachers were ob-

servicing students' language performance on the ESP lessons and noticed that the majority of students have got problems with pronouncing words inappropriately, that had the negative impact on the general understanding. Due to the mentioned above issue, it was decided to choose and test different activities for self-study, self-evaluation and peer assessment in order to enhance pronouncing skills and save time on the lesson. The experiment was conducted with the third-year students of the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" with an intermediate level of English.

In order to find the best activity to advance the technical students' pronunciation skills, there were used classical methods, which were adapted for ESP lessons and integrated in the students' curriculum, complimented with the tasks for creativity, peer and self-assessment. Furthermore, the tasks were successfully adapted for ESP. Below there are the descriptions of the activities that had been experimented and analyzed, also presented the pros and cons, advantages, arguments for/against the proposed methods and activities, and the results.

The first strategy used was the application of *tongue twisters*, as it is the most popular and classical way to practice pronunciation. In the article "The use of tongue twisters" the author examined different uses of tongue twisters to prove that they can be applied in teaching adults: "Depending on the individual question in the questionnaire provided, answers generally gravitated towards a greater percentage of positive attitudes, in terms of introducing elements of entertainment, usefulness, relaxation, etc." [10, p. 163]. The tongue twisters have been used for many years in different countries as a powerful method for practicing sounds, intonation, word stress, especially when starting to learn a new language because they are vital strategy to get quickly adapted to the new words pronouncing. Moreover, they could be easily integrated into the students' curriculum. During the experiment the students were suggested to create at home a tongue twister using the terminology that had been studied during the lesson. Then in the class, there was a competition for the funniest, most clever, most creative one and for the best pronunciation of it. The students had the opportunity to assess their peers, and exchange the objective opinions, as in the competition there was a close vote, which included the election papers, that contained some criteria, such as articulation, intonation, speed, plot, the number of new words used, etc. The students

were provided with the handouts, which contained the evaluation columns as presented in Table 1.

This task had very positive feedback, provoked students' interest and drawn their attention to the correct spelling and learning new vocabulary as well. Most of the students affirmed that it was very amusing, engaging, and motivating. The argument in favour of this activity is the integration of creativity and new vocabulary learning into the process of pronunciation perfectionism. The negative aspect was that some students were reluctant to participate, claiming they have no time, desire and enough creativity for designing their own tongue-twisters. But, from the other hand they agreed to participate in assessment process. This method proved its effectiveness and after the month of practicing, the students reported they felt more comfortable and confident to speak English, learned the new vocabulary and they could understand the group-mates better, thus the use of tongue twisters may well serve as an excellent gym for the oral communication practice, and they work better if peer and self-assessment is used there.

The second method was pronouncing new vocabulary items all together in the classroom and *choral reading*. These activities are great for the young learners of elementary levels and proved their effectiveness, which was analysed in the paper "Effects of Repeated Reading on the Second-Grade Transitional Readers' Fluency and Comprehension" written in 1987 by S.L. Dowhower [5, p. 391]. Since then, a lot of researchers have written a great number of works connected with the use and effectiveness of choral reading, including Pikulski & Chard (2005), Lila Uberty Carrick (2014), who stated that choral reading broadened experiences with different genres, and it made possible to choose any content. Moreover, besides practicing the pronunciation, a student can become more fluent reader, which allows for increased content comprehension [2]. It means that this method is appropriate for integrating it in the ESP lessons. Choral reading suggests reading some text aloud together with other people. The authors of the article "Improving English pronunciation of adults ESL learners through reading aloud assessments" confirm that learning pronunciation through reading aloud is one of the tools to improve communication skill and avoid mispronunciation [8]. This activity was integrated into some ESP lessons and experimented with the focus group consisting of 23 students. The students were offered to read short texts, which contained the new terminology which was presented during the lessons. The conclusions were the following:

Table 1

The tongue twisters evaluation criteria

Criteria/ Mark	<i>very poor</i>	<i>poor</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>excellent</i>
<i>plot</i>					
<i>creativity</i>					
<i>the use of new vocabulary items</i>					
<i>articulation</i>					
<i>intonation</i>					
<i>speed</i>					
<i>grammar accuracy</i>					

the biggest part of the students (80%) reported that they had enjoyed the activity and had found it to be effective for pronunciation skills improvement and team building. Moreover, it proved to enhance students' motivation, due to the fact that cooperation is highly important and beneficial. But on the other hand, 20% of students did not find any advantages of this method, as they did not regard it seriously. Furthermore, this activity can hardly be followed by peer or self-assessment, only on condition that the students are divided in several groups, and have the possibility to evaluate the team of competitors, but this task is time-consuming, which means that it cannot meet the goal of upgrading pronunciation skills without taking much time during the lesson.

The next activity that was proposed to the students was *self-recording*. This idea is not very fresh, but with the development of technologies, the learners now have got more possibilities to record files, share, store, edit them, etc. Using this method, the students were offered to take part in the following experiment. They had to listen to the audio files, which were sent to them, several times, after that they repeated every sentence or the logically finished fragment after the speaker pausing where necessary. The most important and valuable part of the activity was to read the podcast of the audio file and as the next step they had to record themselves, using the smartphone. After the described above actions, it was required to evaluate themselves as objectively as possible using points from 1 till 5, where 1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – satisfactory, 4 – good and 5 – excellent. The students were provided with the assessment criteria chart, which is presented in Table 2.

The next step was to complete the following task: during one month they were performing the same activity out-of-class with the audio files lasting 1-1.5 minutes each. This activity was followed by self-analysis and comparison. The students listened to the original audio file and compared it with their versions. The audio materials were taken from the textbooks Cutting Edge Intermediate [3] and Technical English 3 [1]. These textbooks correspond to the Intermediate language learning level, Cutting Edge is for general English learning and Technical English is the ESP textbook, relevant for engineers, mechanics, and physics. The choice of the audio material was based on such criteria as

the length, the speaker's pronunciation and accent, the pace and the students' current curriculum. Moreover, to get the students' attention and interest as much as possible, all the files contained some unusual facts, data and statistics.

After the experiment was over, in the classroom students presented their files, comparing the first recording and the last, then discussed the results, shared experience and opinions about the effectiveness of such methods, giving feedback and discussing how their pronunciation developed.

The main advantage of self-recording is the ability to hear yourself on the other part, and objectively hear the mistakes and as a consequence try to purify the speaking. To improve some skills it is highly important to observe yourself from the other side, like, for example in dancing, in every studio there is a room-sized mirror so that the dancers could see themselves and make their movements clear and perfect. Moreover, people tend to do some goal-oriented activities, and in this case, the students were motivated to participate in order to see the progress and the difference between the first audio records and the last ones. Despite the method was very effective, there also were some negative aspects. Some students felt very shy to play their files in the class in order to be assessed by the others, because of being afraid to be laughed at and criticized and there were also students, who recorded only 2 files, at the beginning of the experiment and at the end, due to their indifference, desire just to get a mark for the completed task and the lack of self-motivation. Also, some students reported they have no ear for music, and for this reason they failed to analyze their work in the full amount. Regardless of these drawbacks, the majority of the students affirmed the effectiveness of such activities and noticed improvement of their pronunciation. This method is also beneficial because it is not time-consuming, the students reported to have spent no more than 10 minutes on completing one task, which included listening to the audio file, reading it aloud accompanied with recording it. Also it must be stated that such activities can work well and bring results only if they are done regularly.

Conclusion. Having analyzed the three different activities (the use of tongue twisters, choral reading and self-recording) followed by peer and

Table 2

Self-assessment of pronunciation questionnaire

	Assess each pronunciation feature according to your current ability (before the experiment)	Assess each pronunciation feature according to your current ability (after the experiment)
Stress	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent
Articulation	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent
Intonation	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent	1 – very poor 2 – poor 3 – satisfactory 4 – good 5 – excellent

self-assessment it must be concluded that all these methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and much depends on the students' self-motivation, appropriate teachers' guidelines and the desire to cooperate, work for the common purpose of improving and increasing the amount of quality time on the ESP lessons. Based on the results of the conducted experiments it can be summarized that self-recording activity is an excellent option to give

students a fair amount of time and opportunity to study and practice. Recording assignment is a productive way for students to interact, engage and reveal their creativity. Moreover, it can be considered as the contemporary language learning method, due to the modern development of electronic gadgets, which give people much more possibilities to study, conduct experiments, save time and enhance motivation.

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