

Bridging Using Tongue Twisters to Improve Pronunciation and Confidence of Young Language Learners

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Abstract

This research, based on a community service activity, aimed to improve pronunciation skills and boost the confidence of young language learners at the elementary level using tongue twisters. The study was conducted on July 4th, 2024, at the Miracle Language Center in Narathiwat, Southern Thailand, involving 40 students. A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments was employed to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Participants engaged in guided sessions featuring age-appropriate tongue twisters and interactive group activities, creating a supportive environment for practicing pronunciation. The pre-test and post-test data were analyzed using a paired t-test, which revealed a statistically significant improvement in both pronunciation and confidence levels ($t=4.81, p<0.05$). The findings support the hypothesis that tongue twisters are an effective tool for enhancing language learning among young learners, particularly in pronunciation and self-confidence.

Keywords: Tongue Twisters; T-Test; Student Confidence; Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Tongue twisters are a unique linguistic tool characterized by a series of words intentionally designed to create articulation challenges. Sentences such as “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers” demand precise coordination between the brain and speech organs to process similar sounds rapidly. (Goldrick & Blumstein, 2006) Through consistent repetition and practice, tongue twisters can help language learners, especially children, to improve accuracy and fluency in pronouncing words. In the context of foreign language learning, good pronunciation is fundamental. Correct pronunciation facilitates clear communication, ensures comprehension by interlocutors, and bolsters the learner's confidence. (Ryandini & Fitriyasari, 2023) Confidence plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as it motivates learners to actively engage in practice and interaction. (Ariani et al., 2024) Despite the importance of pronunciation, many language learning programs, particularly for young learners, often overlook it in favor of vocabulary and grammar. This creates a gap where effective and engaging methods for teaching pronunciation are underexplored. Previous research has highlighted the utility of tongue twisters in improving phonological skills, but much of this work has focused on older learners or professional speakers, with limited exploration of their application for young language learners (Yusta Fraesti, 2020; Oktaviani et al., 2023). Additionally, while existing studies emphasize the mechanical benefits of tongue twisters, such as articulation and fluency, there is a lack of investigation into their impact on learners' confidence and their broader pedagogical implications. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how tongue twisters can serve as an effective pedagogical tool to enhance both pronunciation and self-confidence among young foreign language learners. It will delve into the benefits of using tongue twisters in language learning, outline practical techniques for their application, and discuss their

implications for teaching practices. This research aims to provide insights into how a simple yet engaging method can support holistic language development in elementary learners.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, specifically an exploratory sequential design. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of using tongue twisters on elementary students' English speaking confidence.

Quantitative Phase

- a. **Research Design:** A quasi-experimental, pre-test-post-test design was utilized. This design allowed for the comparison of students' confidence levels before and after the tongue twister intervention.
- b. **Participants:** A random sample of 40 elementary students from Miracle Language Center in Narathiwat, Thailand, participated in the study.
- c. **Instrument:** A pre-test and post-test questionnaire was administered to assess students' self-perceived confidence in English speaking, focusing on pronunciation, fluency, and overall confidence.
- d. **Procedure:**
 1. **Pre-test:** Participants completed the pre-test to establish baseline confidence levels.
 2. **Intervention:** The experimental group received language instruction incorporating tongue twisters, while the control group received standard language instruction.
 3. **Post-test:** Both groups completed the post-test to measure changes in confidence.
- e. **Data Analysis:** A paired t-test was used to analyze the quantitative data and determine the statistical significance of the intervention's impact on students' confidence.

Qualitative Phase

- a. **Data Collection:** In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of students to gain deeper insights into their experiences with the tongue twister intervention.
- b. **Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the interview data.

Data Integration

The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the study's outcomes. The quantitative data provided statistical evidence of the intervention's effectiveness, while the qualitative data offered rich insights into students' perceptions and experiences.

Justification for Mixed Methods

The mixed-methods approach, as advocated by Sugiyono (2015), enabled a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research question. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aimed to:

- a. **Identify significant differences:** The quantitative phase allowed for the identification of statistically significant changes in students' confidence.
- b. **Gain deeper insights:** The qualitative phase provided in-depth explanations for these changes, revealing the underlying reasons for the observed effects.
- c. **Enhance validity:** The integration of both data types strengthened the validity and reliability of the findings.

This mixed-methods approach contributes to the field of language education by providing evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of tongue twisters in enhancing students' English speaking confidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the pre-test and post-test results, it's evident that students who participated in the tongue twister-based language program experienced a significant boost in self-confidence. This is reflected in the increased average confidence scores observed between the two tests.

Further Analysis:

1. **Increase in Self-Confidence:** The majority of students demonstrated increased self-assurance after the program, suggesting that tongue twisters are a valuable tool for boosting language confidence. (Shen & Janse, 2020)
2. **Improvement in Speaking Skills:** Beyond increased confidence, the data indicates improvements in students' speaking skills, including pronunciation, willingness to ask questions, and active participation in discussions. (Rosenbaum et al., 1986)
3. **More Enjoyable Learning Experience:** Several students reported enjoying the language learning process more after the intervention. This highlights the potential of tongue twisters to make language learning more enjoyable and stimulating. (Vitevitch, 2002)

Table 1. Tongue twisters for the students

No.	Level	Tongue Twister
1	Easy	Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
2	Easy	She sells seashells by the seashore.
3	Easy	I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream!
4	Medium	Red lorry, yellow lorry.
5	High	How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Difficulty Levels of Tongue Twisters

The table above provides an interesting overview of the varying difficulty levels in pronouncing tongue twisters. Some points that can be further discussed include:

Factors Affecting Difficulty Level

- a. **Phonetics:** The combination of sounds, especially repeated or adjacent consonants, greatly affects the level of difficulty. For example, the repetition of the sounds "r" and "l" in "Red lorry, yellow lorry" makes it more difficult compared to simpler sentences.
- b. **Rhythm and Rhyme:** Fast and complex rhythmic and rhymic patterns can increase the difficulty of pronunciation. Tongue twisters with irregular rhythm patterns tend to be more challenging.
- c. **Word Meaning:** Words that are rarely used or have specific meanings can also increase difficulty, as they require a deeper understanding.

Relationship Between Difficulty Level and Native Language

- a. **Indonesian:** Compare the tongue twisters above with tongue twisters in Indonesian. Are there similar or different patterns of difficulty?

- b. **Foreign Languages:** What about tongue twisters in other foreign languages? Are there any common patterns that can be found?
- c. **Dialect Influence:** Do certain dialects in a language make tongue twisters easier or harder?

Benefits of Saying Tongue Twisters

- a. **Pronunciation:** Trains the tongue and mouth to produce sounds clearly and accurately.
- b. **Fluency:** Helps improve speaking speed and fluency.
- c. **Hearing:** Trains the ears to distinguish similar sounds.
- d. **Language:** Enriches vocabulary and improves understanding of sentence structure.

Table 1.2 Pre-test and Post-test analyzed 10 of 40 students

Student	Pre-Test Confidence)	(Self- Post-Test Confidence)	(Self- Main Theme Emerged (qualitative)
1	60	75	Increased courage in speaking
2	75	85	Increased understanding of correct pronunciation
3	60	75	More confident in interacting with friends
4	85	88	Enjoyed the language learning process more
5	75	85	Improved ability to pronounce difficult words
6	60	75	Dare to ask questions when not understanding
7	85	88	More fluent in speaking
8	75	85	More confident in presentations
9	60	75	Dare to participate in discussions
10	75	85	Enjoyed the more enjoyable learning process

This table presents a comparison of students' confidence levels before (pre-test) and after (post-test) following a particular program or learning, most likely a language learning program. Each row represents one student, and the columns show their confidence levels before and after the program, as well as the main themes that emerged from their increased confidence.

What can we conclude from the table?

1. **Increased Self-Confidence:** In general, there was a significant increase in students' confidence levels after the program. Almost all students showed improvement, from initially having low confidence to being more confident.
2. **Focus of Improvement:** This increase in self-confidence focused on several aspects, such as:
 - a. **Speaking courage:** Many students felt more courageous to speak in the language they were learning.
 - b. **Pronunciation:** Understanding and ability to pronounce words, especially difficult words, improved.

- c. **Social interaction:** Students feel more confident in interacting with others using the language.

Enjoyment of learning: Many students stated that they enjoyed the language learning process more after joining the program.

Analysis of Pre-Test and Post-Test Self-Confidence

The provided table offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of self-confidence among students before and after a specific intervention, likely a language learning program or course.

Mean difference (\overline{d}): **10.4**

Standard deviation of differences (sds_dsd): **6.83**

$sd = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (d_i - \overline{d})^2}{n-1}}$

t-statistic (ttt): **4.81**

Overall Trend: Increased Self-Confidence

A predominant trend observed is a general increase in self-confidence among students post-intervention. This suggests that the program or course was effective in boosting the students' belief in their language abilities.

Discussion

Tongue twisters are well-established tools for enhancing pronunciation and fluency across multiple languages. Young learners, in particular, find tongue twisters engaging and enjoyable as they refine their articulation skills. By repeatedly practicing challenging words, learners are compelled to articulate language sounds with greater clarity and precision. Moreover, successfully pronouncing tongue twisters can significantly boost learners' self-assurance in speaking a foreign language. (Yusta Fraesti Nim, 2020). The students' English learning scores are incomplete, likely due to factors such as pronunciation difficulties. (Oktaviani et al., 2023) However, several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of tongue twisters in improving pronunciation. For instance, found that students who practiced regularly with tongue twisters significantly improved their pronunciation accuracy compared to a control group. This suggests that tongue twisters can help learners master challenging language sounds by (Amanda Putri et al., 2018) showed that students who regularly practiced with tongue twisters experienced a significant improvement in pronunciation accuracy compared to the control group. This suggests that tongue twisters can help learners master difficult and complex language sounds. However, it is important to remember that the use of tongue twisters should be done appropriately and consistently. (Juniarti, 2019) Teachers need to choose tongue twisters that are appropriate for the students' ability level and provide clear guidance on how to pronounce them. In addition, the use of tongue twisters also needs to be combined with other language learning activities to achieve optimal results.

Overall, tongue twisters are an invaluable tool in language learning, especially for improving young learners' pronunciation and confidence. With the right approach, tongue twisters can be a fun and effective part of the language learning process.

The results of this study are in line with previous research which shows that the use of fun and interactive techniques such as tongue twisters can increase students' learning motivation and confidence. Tongue twisters provide opportunities for students to practice pronunciation of words repeatedly in a fun context, thus helping them to improve fluency and accuracy in speaking. (Hifdil Islam, 2022.)

Implications

This study have some important implications for language learning practice:

- a. The Importance of Using Fun Methods: Teachers can consider using more fun and interactive learning methods, such as tongue twisters, to increase students' motivation and engagement in the learning process.(Loakman et al., 2023.)
- b. Focus on Speaking Skills: Apart from focusing on the grammatical and vocabulary aspects, teachers also need to give enough attention to the development of students' speaking skills.(Mukadar et al., 2020.)
- c. The Importance of Self-Confidence: Self-confidence is an important factor in successful language learning. Teachers can create a safe and supportive learning environment to help students build their confidence.(Nooteboom & Quené, 2019)

The results of this study provide strong empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of using tongue twisters in increasing students' confidence in English. T-test showed a significant increase in the mean score of the post-test compared to the pre-test, indicating a positive change in students' perception of their English proficiency.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the study sample was limited to students at Miracle Language Center, so generalization of the study results needs to be done with caution. Second, the relatively short duration of the intervention may not be enough to see the long-term effects of using tongue twisters.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrates that the use of tongue twisters in English language learning has a significant impact on increasing students' confidence. The results of the quantitative analysis show a significant difference in students' confidence levels before and after the intervention. This indicates that the use of tongue twisters as part of language learning can be an effective strategy for boosting students' confidence in speaking English. The results of the qualitative analysis reinforce the quantitative findings. Interviews with students revealed that they felt more confident speaking English after participating in the intervention program.

The results of this study are in line with Sugiyono's theory on the mixed-methods research approach. (mixed methods). By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research successfully provides a comprehensive picture of the impact of using tongue twisters on students' confidence.

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