THE ROLE OF READING EXERCISES IN TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO SECOND-GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract. Pronunciation plays an important role in learning English, especially for young learners who are developing their first language skills in a new linguistic environment. At the primary-school level, children need regular practice to recognise English sounds and use them correctly in everyday communication. This article examines how reading exercises can contribute to the development of pronunciation among second-grade pupils. Particular attention is given to reading aloud, repeated reading, phonics activities, rhymes and picture-supported reading. The article is based on a review of educational research and literature related to early language learning. The discussion suggests that reading activities can support pronunciation when they are combined with listening practice, teacher guidance and regular feedback. Practical classroom examples are also presented to show how teachers can make pronunciation practice more interesting and accessible for young learners.

Keywords: English pronunciation, reading exercises, primary education, young learners, phonics, reading aloud, language learning.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language at an early age gives children an opportunity to become familiar with new sounds, words and ways of communication. English lessons in primary school are particularly important because they help pupils develop the basic skills they will need in the following years. At this stage, children usually learn through simple explanations, visual materials, repetition and practical activities. Therefore, pronunciation should be an important part of their everyday English lessons. Pronunciation is sometimes considered less important than grammar or vocabulary. However, these language skills are closely connected. A pupil may know many English words and understand their meanings, but poor pronunciation can make communication difficult. For this reason, children should learn not only how words are written but also how they sound when spoken.

English pronunciation can be challenging for beginners. One reason is that English spelling does not always correspond directly to pronunciation. The sounds /θ/ and /ð/, which appear in words such as “three” and “this”, are examples of sounds that may require additional practice. Similarly, young learners may have difficulty distinguishing between /ɪ/ and /iː/, as in “ship” and “sheep”.

Reading exercises can help children become more familiar with these differences. When pupils listen to a teacher reading a text, they can follow the written words and connect them with their spoken forms. After listening, they can repeat the words and practise reading them independently. Nevertheless, reading alone cannot develop all aspects of pronunciation. Children also need listening activities, opportunities to speak and guidance from their teachers. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of reading exercises in teaching English pronunciation to second-grade pupils. It also discusses practical activities that teachers can use to make pronunciation practice more effective and interesting.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND PRONUNCIATION

The importance of pronunciation in early language learning

Pronunciation is one of the first language skills that young learners begin to develop. It includes the production of individual sounds, word stress, rhythm and intonation. These elements help people understand spoken messages and communicate more naturally. For second-grade pupils, pronunciation lessons should begin with simple and familiar words. Children should first listen to the sounds and then try to reproduce them. Long theoretical explanations are usually unnecessary at this level. Instead, teachers can use examples, pictures, songs and short reading activities.

Another important concept is phonological awareness. It refers to the ability to recognise and work with the sounds of spoken language. For example, children develop this ability when they identify rhyming words, recognise the first sound in a word or divide words into syllables.

Phonics is also important in early English education. It helps pupils understand the relationship between written letters and spoken sounds. For instance, children may learn that the combination “sh” represents the sound /ʃ/, as in “shop” and “fish”. Although phonological awareness and phonics are related, they are not exactly the same. Phonological awareness focuses on recognising sounds, while phonics connects sounds with written letters. Both can support children's reading and pronunciation development.

These skills are useful in pronunciation lessons because they encourage pupils to pay attention to how words sound. A child who can hear the difference between two sounds is in a better position to practise producing them.

How reading exercises improve pronunciation practice

Reading exercises provide children with an opportunity to connect written language with speech. When pupils read words aloud, they practise producing sounds and become more familiar with English vocabulary. Different reading activities can support

pronunciation in different ways. Reading aloud allows pupils to practise individual words and sentences. Repeated reading helps them become more familiar with the same text. Rhyming activities encourage children to recognise similar sounds, while picture-supported reading makes unfamiliar vocabulary easier to understand. However, teachers should remember that recognising a written word does not necessarily mean that a pupil can pronounce it correctly. Some children may read a word without understanding how its sounds should be produced. For this reason, new vocabulary should first be introduced orally. Pupils need to hear the teacher pronounce a word before they are asked to read it independently.

Research also highlights the importance of sound awareness in early reading. Odo (2021) examined the effects of phonological-awareness and phonics instruction on English word-reading outcomes among second-language learners. The findings support the use of sound-focused activities alongside reading instruction.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative review of existing research and educational literature related to pronunciation teaching, phonics and early reading development. Several academic sources were considered, including the National Reading Panel report (2000), Odo (2021), Abe (2024), See and Gorard (2020), and Suggate (2016). These publications provide information about early literacy instruction, sound awareness and the role of reading activities in language learning.

The literature was examined with attention to three main aspects: the relationship between phonological awareness and reading, the benefits of guided oral reading, and the use of pronunciation activities in primary-school classrooms. In addition to the literature review, the article presents practical classroom activities that teachers may use with second-grade pupils. These examples are suggestions based on the reviewed sources and general teaching principles. They are not presented as the results of a classroom experiment.

PRACTICAL READING ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

Reading activities become more effective when they are suitable for children's age, interests and language level. Second-grade pupils generally respond well to short tasks that include repetition, pictures and interaction.

Reading aloud

Reading aloud is one of the simplest activities for practising pronunciation. In this activity, the teacher reads a word, sentence or short passage while pupils listen carefully. After listening, pupils repeat the words together. Later, they can practise individually or in pairs.

For example, teachers may use simple sentences such as:

- This is a big cat.
- I have a red ball.
- She has a small fish.
- My brother likes apples.

These sentences contain familiar vocabulary and allow pupils to practise different English sounds. The teacher should pay attention to pronunciation without interrupting pupils after every small mistake. If a child has difficulty with a particular word, the teacher can pronounce it again and encourage the pupil to repeat it. This approach makes reading practice more comfortable and helps children become more confident.

Repeated reading

Repeated reading means reading the same text several times. It is particularly useful for young learners because repetition helps them become familiar with vocabulary and sentence structures. For example, the teacher can prepare a short text called “My Little Dog”. The activity can be organised in three stages. First, the teacher reads the text while pupils listen. Second, pupils read it together with the teacher. Finally, they try to read it independently or with a partner. At the beginning, some pupils may read slowly or hesitate when they meet unfamiliar words. After several attempts, they may become more comfortable with the text.

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), guided repeated oral reading with feedback can support reading fluency, word recognition and comprehension. Although repeated reading is mainly used to develop reading skills, it also creates opportunities to practise pronunciation.

Phonics activities

Phonics activities help pupils understand how letters and letter combinations represent sounds. Teachers can introduce one sound at a time and provide several examples. For instance, the sound /ʃ/ can be practised through the following words:

- Ship
- Shop
- Fish
- She

Similarly, the sound /tʃ/ can be introduced through:

- Chair
- Cheese
- Teacher
- Chicken

First, pupils listen to the teacher. Then they repeat the words and try to read them aloud. It is important to introduce the correct pronunciation before asking children to read unfamiliar words. This is especially necessary in English because spelling is not always a reliable guide to pronunciation. Short phonics activities can be included in ordinary reading lessons without taking too much classroom time.

Rhyming activities

Rhymes are another useful way to develop children's awareness of English sounds. Young learners often enjoy activities involving words that have similar endings. Teachers can introduce simple groups such as:

- Cat – hat – bat
- Sun – fun – run
- Dog – log – frog
- Day – play – say

Pupils listen to the words and identify which ones rhyme. They can repeat the words, match them with pictures or use them in simple sentences. For example, the teacher may show a picture of a cat and ask pupils to find another word that sounds similar. These activities help children pay attention to pronunciation in an enjoyable way. They also make language lessons more interactive.

Picture-supported reading

Pictures can make reading activities easier for children, especially when they meet new vocabulary. For example, a teacher can show pictures of an apple, a book, a fish or a school bag. The teacher says each word clearly, and pupils repeat it. After that, the written form of the word is introduced. Pupils look at the picture, read the word and pronounce it aloud. This activity connects three important elements: visual information, written language and spoken language.

Pictures also help pupils understand the meaning of words without depending entirely on translation.

Paired reading

Paired reading allows pupils to practise pronunciation with their classmates. In this activity, two pupils work together. One reads a short sentence while the other follows the text and listens. After completing the sentence, they change roles.

For example:

Pupil A: I have a little sister.

Pupil B: Her name is Anna.

Pupil A: She likes playing with dolls.

The teacher moves around the classroom and provides assistance when necessary. Paired reading is useful because every pupil gets an opportunity to read. It can also help children feel more comfortable than when they are asked to read in front of the entire class.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING PRONUNCIATION

The teacher plays an important role in helping young learners develop correct pronunciation habits. Children often imitate the sounds and words they hear during lessons. Therefore, teachers should provide clear and understandable pronunciation models. Choosing appropriate reading materials is another important responsibility. Texts should be short, interesting and suitable for the pupils' language level. If the material contains too many unfamiliar words, children may lose interest and focus less on pronunciation. Feedback should also be given carefully. When pupils make mistakes, teachers should explain the correct pronunciation and give them another opportunity to practise. Constantly interrupting children can make them nervous and reduce their willingness to participate. It is also important to understand that pupils do not learn at the same speed. Some children may pronounce new words easily, while others need additional listening and repetition. Teachers should take these differences into account when planning classroom activities.

Progress can be observed through simple classroom assessment. Teachers may pay attention to whether pupils can:

- Recognise familiar English sounds.
- Pronounce common words clearly.
- Read short sentences with appropriate pauses.
- Repeat words after hearing the teacher.
- Participate in reading activities with greater confidence.

The purpose of assessment should be to understand each pupil's progress and identify areas that need further practice. Most importantly, the aim of pronunciation teaching should be understandable speech rather than the perfect imitation of a native speaker.

DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature and teaching approaches indicate that reading exercises can be a useful part of pronunciation instruction in primary education. They provide opportunities for children to hear, recognise and produce English sounds in meaningful contexts. Each activity contributes in a different way. Phonics helps pupils understand the relationship between letters and sounds. Rhymes develop awareness of similar sound patterns, while reading aloud allows children to practise words and sentences. Picture-supported and paired reading make lessons more accessible and interactive.

However, reading activities should not be used separately from other language skills. Listening is necessary because children need to hear accurate pronunciation models. Speaking activities are equally important because pupils must have opportunities to use the words they have learned.

Motivation should also be considered. Young learners are more likely to participate when lessons include interesting texts, pictures, familiar topics and simple games. Teachers should therefore select activities according to the needs and interests of their pupils.

A balanced approach that combines reading, listening and speaking can create better opportunities for pronunciation practice.

CONCLUSION

Reading exercises have an important place in teaching English pronunciation to second-grade pupils. Through reading aloud, repeated reading, phonics, rhymes, picture-supported tasks and paired reading, children can become more familiar with English sounds and learn to connect written words with their spoken forms.

The effectiveness of these activities depends on how they are organised. Teachers should choose age-appropriate materials, provide clear pronunciation models and give pupils enough time to practise. Listening and speaking should also be included because pronunciation cannot be developed through written texts alone. Another important factor is the classroom atmosphere. Children should feel comfortable when speaking English and should understand that making mistakes is a normal part of learning.

This article has examined existing literature and presented practical teaching suggestions rather than reporting experimental results. Further classroom research could explore how different reading activities influence the pronunciation development of young learners.

In general, carefully organised reading exercises can help establish a strong foundation for English pronunciation and support children's future language learning.

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