

**HELPING YOUNG LEARNERS
TO LEARN AUDIO DISCRIMINATION
BY USING FLASHCARDS**

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ABSTRACT

The ability of young learners to grasp and to imitate what they hear is one of potential opportunities that should be taken into account by EYL teachers. They can use this advantage to facilitate them to acquire a good pronunciation since their earlier age. This article then tries to propose a classroom idea on how to help young learners learn audio discrimination by using flashcards. Audio discrimination is the ability to recognize the similarities and the differences among different sounds. This ability is very important to be developed especially for the teaching of reading since learners need to discriminate between sounds associated with different letters. Flashcards are considered as appropriate media because of its practicality to be used in the classroom and its economical reason. The detail of teaching procedure will be listed in pre-, whilst-, and post- teaching so that it is expected that this article give practical benefit to EYL teachers' classroom practices.

Key words: EYL, Audio Discrimination, Flashcard

The popularity of English as a world's language affects the public policy and the number of people who are interested in learning English. As a result, nowadays English is learned by both adults and young learners. Regarding to young learners, the teaching of English in Indonesia has been regulated in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 060/U/1993 dated 25 February 1993 (Rachmanjati, 2008 :161). It is stated that English can be taught to elementary students. Although in the present of Curriculum 2013, English for Young Learners (EYL) used to be a controversial issue, there are many schools which keep English as their local content subject because of several reasons.

Young learners are defined as the students or children between the age of 5 until 12 years old (Suyanto, 2010: 15; Linse, 2005:2). According to the Critical Period hypothesis, this is golden age period of language acquisition. The hypothesis stated that the ability to learn a native language develops within a fixed period, from birth to puberty. During this critical period, language acquisition proceeds easily, swiftly, and without external intervention. Consequently, young learners can learn a second or foreign language particularly effectively before puberty because their brains are still able to use the mechanisms that assisted first language acquisition (Linse, 2001:13). Thus, in term of theory, the teaching of English to young learners has a great benefit in fostering the acquisition process.

Next, EYL also offers a benefit in preparing Indonesia's future human resources in the globalized era. Rachmajanti (2008: 162) mentions that some diverse area in Indonesia requires its inhabitants including adolescent children to be able to speak in English because of the demand of tourism industries. In addition, the teaching of EYL is also expected to be able to help the improvement of English instruction in secondary schools. Huda and Nababan (1995, cited in Rachmajanti, 2008: 162) reports that English instruction in secondary school was considered unsuccessful based on the unsatisfactory result of high schools final examination. The belief that the earlier children learn a foreign language, the better their target language proficiency, then, becomes another reason to include English in elementary school curriculum to fix that condition.

Another plausible argument to take English as subject to teach to young learners is related to the characteristics of young learners themselves. Young learners usually repeat exactly what they hear. Klancar (2006) said "They are like sponges, they soak up everything we say and how we say it." It, of course, brings an advantage in the teaching of pronunciation. It can be a chance for teachers to help children to acquire clear and accurate pronunciation. Otherwise, it will be difficult to achieve when they pass their puberty. Thus, in their age, young learners have greater chance to gain a near-native pronunciation.

However, one of problems in teaching pronunciation to EYL is students' difficulty in discriminating sounds. The students' ability to identify and distinguish between different sounds is called auditory discrimination skill (HighRich Learning Module, 2007). It is a step-by-step developmental process which means it develops as young learners grow and develop. Thus, teacher needs to help them to note the similarities and differences among sounds by providing a wide variety and appropriate activities. Using some media, of course, is a fruitful way to engage their attention and interest during the lesson.

Flashcards can be alternative media for this purpose. Suyanto (2007) stated that flash cards are the most important teaching resource to have and also helpful to teach pronunciation. Based on this consideration, this article tries to elaborate the use of flash cards for teaching audio discrimination through several fun and interesting activities for EYL Classroom.

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This article proposes a classroom idea aims to help EYL teachers to promote their students acquiring audio discrimination skill. The discussion begins a brief review about the teaching of pronunciation to young learners, audio discrimination skill and its importance to young learners, and flashcards as teaching media in EYL classroom. Then, it will be followed by the teaching procedure which will clearly describe what a teacher should do in pre-, whilst-, and post-teaching stages.

The Teaching of Pronunciation to Young Learners

Teaching pronunciation is significantly important in EFL context. English learners are required to have clear and accurate pronunciation to comprehend messages presented orally and to deliver their taught, feeling, and experiences intelligibly for communicative purpose

(Cahyono & Utami, 2011: 121). English teacher need to teach and give enough pronunciation practices for learners because we do not have intense exposure in every day life.

The benefit of teaching pronunciation in EYL class is the young learners' strength on their auditory receptive component which involves the capability in listening and oral performance (Like, 2012: 184). Therefore, young learners are good in imitating the target language orally. However, it is not a guarantee that they can easily learn L2 pronunciation. There are also some limitations and interferences that may make them difficult to recognize sounds in a new language they hear. In addition, some English sounds are not available in Indonesian sounds. These sounds, then, are potentially cause problem in pronunciation if they are not trained well and having enough practices (Cahyono & Utami, 2011: 126).

In teaching pronunciation to young learners, teachers should aware with their characteristics. Although young learners can easily go with any activities designed by teachers because of their high enthusiasm (Linse, 2001: 17), they also have limited attention span (Harmer, 2001: 38). Consequently, teaching activities should be limited into five to ten minutes only. It means teachers should provide various teaching activities to engage them during the lesson. Singing, playing games, or using interesting media can solve this classroom problem. Furthermore, Brown (2007:102) mentions that children (up to the age of about 11) are still in an intellectual development process. They have limitations because they are still in what Piaget (1972) called as concrete operational stage (cited in Santrock, 2004: 46). Rules, explanations and other abstract talk about language should be avoided in EYL classroom (Brown, 2007: 102). Therefore, teachers cannot explain how to pronounce and notice the characteristics of the sounds in EYL class as to adult class. Using visual aid media such as flashcards can be a helpful way to make them understand what they teachers intend to teach.

Audio Discrimination Skill and Its Importance

One of the problems encounter by EYL teachers in teaching pronunciation is the learners' difficulty to distinguish similarities and differences among different sounds. This ability is called as audio discrimination skill. This skill is beneficial for young learners when they begin to read. They need to be able to discriminate between the sounds associated with different letters. Thus, it is also related to phonological awareness which has strong positive correlation to reading success (Adam in Wattiheluw, 2009).

Despite of its importance, developing learners' audio discrimination skill has potential problem in foreign language classroom. Some sounds are different or cannot be found in the children's native language. For example, Cahyono and Widiati (2011: 126) find that Indonesian learners of EFL have difficulty in pronouncing long vowels such as /i:/, /u:/, and /ɜ:/, affricate sounds /tʃ/ and

/dʒ/ as well as interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/. Sulatri and Weda (2009, as cited in Cahyono and Widiati, 2011: 128) also study that the interference of the learners' local language background makes Indonesian learners difficult to gain clear and accurate English pronunciation. These facts offers more challenge for EYL teachers to help their children recognize that there are some differences in English sounds.

The way to solve that problem is by training audio discrimination skill since the earlier age. Acquiring skill to recognize the difference and similarities among foreign sounds requires a lot trainings and practices. Therefore, by introducing audio discrimination skill to young

learners it is not only to have a greater chance to help them gain clear and accurate pronunciation but also to accelerate the process regarding the young learners' strength on their auditory receptive components. However, it is also should be notice that children have some limitations regarding to their characteristics in learning as mentioned above. Thus, simple, engaging, and enjoyable lesson should be taken into account while designing activities for teaching audio discrimination skill.

Flashcards as Teaching Media for EYL Classroom

Flash cards are a nice media to make students' interested during the lesson. It is a big card, usually made of big and thick paper with A4 size (Kasihani, 2010: 109). Flash cards used for teaching pronunciation is called phonic phonics cards which is a flash card with a phonic sound on one side and a picture that illustrates the sound on the other. Flash cards should be designed colorful with interesting pictures to engage students' attention.

Flashcards is a practical media which can be used for the whole classroom or in groups. Teachers can make flashcards themselves or directly downloads from several website which provide this media freely. In other words, flashcards is highly recommended for media because of its practicality and economical reason.

The benefit of using flashcards to learners learning English has been supported by empirical research. Rusdiana (2002) has developed flashcards as media to help fourth graders improve their vocabulary. The result shows that this kind of media can positively increase the number of students' vocabulary. Next, Kusumaningtyas (2009) in her study about the effectiveness of using flashcards on the vocabulary mastery of junior high school also found that there was significance different between students who are taught using flashcards and those who taught without using flashcards in their vocabulary mastery. Then, Gloud at al (2013) also found that flashcards was an effective media to help children with disabilities to learn. They invited seven and nine years old children with disabilities to master the names and sounds of the 18 most common lower case letters of the alphabet. Finally they conclude that direct instruction flashcards in combination with guided practice can help on the participant mastery on the task. Although the writer did not find previous research which discusses the use or the effectiveness of using flashcards to develop learners' audio discrimination skill in EFL setting but those research, at least, can give supporting data that flashcards is a helpful and interesting media so that learners can be engaged during the lesson and eventually improve their English.

The Teaching Procedures

This procedure describe what the teacher and students do on using flashcards as media for teaching audio discrimination. The activity are designed in vary and short to avoid students getting bored during the lesson. The sounds taught are focus on sounds /p/ and /f/, /l/ and /s/, /θ/ and /ð/ , as well as some long vowels such as /i:/ and /u:/. According to the writer's experience, those sounds are almost similar to students.

Pre-teaching

1. Play "Phonics song" song and ask students to listen. Then, sing it together.

Whilst-Teaching

2. Show some flashcards and give example to the students how to pronounce the sounds (See Appendix for the flashcards example).
3. Show again the flash cards and now ask them to repeat what teacher said.
4. Now, stick three flashcards in the blackboard and ask students to read. Ask them to notice the differences.
5. Play “Spy”game. First, teacher should tick the flash cards every where in the class. Then the teacher said, “I spy with my little eyes something that is begun with the sounds: /p/. Ask students to point out and say which flash card show the sound. It is also possible to use real things in the classroom.
6. Give assessment to students to choose different sound among three flashcards shows by teacher. Ask them to write down the answer in their notebook.

Post-Teaching

7. Sing this song (using “London Bridge is Falling Down” tone). Teacher may make this activity more interesting, then, by dividing the class into two groups. They are interchangeably sing teacher verse and student response lyric. Give point for the group who give right response.

	(Teacher								Verse)
~	What's	the	first	(or last)	sound	that	you	hear?	
~	That		you	hear,	that	you		hear?	
~	What's	the	first	(or last)	sound	that	you	hear?	
~		In		fan,		fan,		fan?	
	(Student								Response)
~	/f/	is	the	sound	that	I		hear,	
~	That		I	hear,	that	I		hear.	
~	/f/	is	the	sound	that	I		hear	
~	At the first of fan.								

CONCLUSION

Learning audio discrimination concentrates on word sounds rather than words meaning so that teacher should help the learners by practicing it as frequent as possible. Teacher can use flashcards as media to make them better understand the similarities and differences of the targeted sounds. It would be better if the flashcards designed with interesting pictures and colorful. The use of song and games also can help them to be engaged during the lesson.

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Sources of song and downloadable flashcards:

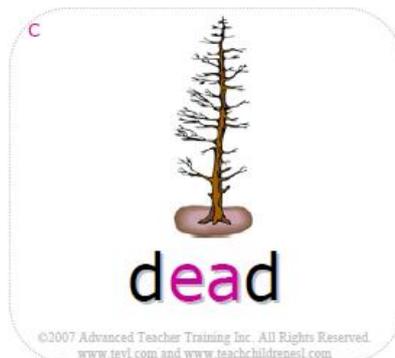
www.teyl.com

www.teachingchildrenesl.com

www.youtube.com

APPENDIX

Example of flash cards:



Note: Flashcards to teach other sounds can be freely downloaded at www.teachingchildrenesl.com and www.teyl.com.