Color Vowel Approach: Coping with Students' Learning Styles in Teaching Pronunciation

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Abstract: Verbal communication is reasonably challenging since it is required to carry precisely pronounced information in order to be transmitted successfully. Thereby, Pronunciation Practice is one of the courses taught to language learners in their early stage of learning process. The objective of this study was to probe how to provide an approach which cope with students' learning styles in teaching Pronunciation Practice course. This qualitative research was conducted at the English Education study program of Islamic State University Datokarama Palu where second semester students of academic year 2021/2022 contributed as participants. Data gathered from pre-research survey, field notes, and semi-structured interview showed that Color Vowel approach thrived to cope with students' learning style in Pronunciation Practice course. It helped the students to easily comprehend material being taught as well as yielded a relaxed learning environment where students could learn best.

Keywords: English; Learning styles; Pronunciation

Abstrak: Komunikasi verbal merupakan suatu hal yang menantang karena diperlukan penyampaian informasi yang diucapkan secara tepat agar pesan tersebut tersampaikan dengan sukses. Oleh karena itu, Latihan Pengucapan merupakan salah satu mata kuliah yang diajarkan kepada pembelajar bahasa pada tahap awal proses pembelajaran. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki bagaimana memberikan pendekatan yang sesuai dengan gaya belajar siswa dalam mengajar mata kuliah Praktik Pengucapan. Penelitian kualitatif ini dilakukan di program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu dimana mahasiswa semester dua tahun ajaran 2021/2022 berkontribusi sebagai partisipan. Data yang dikumpulkan dari survei pra-penelitian, catatan lapangan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan *Color Vowel* berhasil mengakomodir gaya belajar siswa dalam mata kuliah Praktik Pengucapan. Hal ini membantu siswa untuk dengan mudah memahami materi yang diajarkan serta menghasilkan lingkungan belajar yang santai di mana siswa dapat belajar dengan baik.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris; Gaya belajar; Pelafalan

INTRODUCTION

Oral communication relies consequently on how sounds are perceived by the ears of the listeners. The sounds then bring soul to the grammatical structure a set of vocabularies is tied to (Darcy, 2018). Having said that, a certain information carried within an utterance would ineffectively be transferred without producing correct sounds. Thus, pronunciation as one of the branches of Phonology plays a crucial part in mastering language, including a foreign one.

Despite being widely taught in EFL class around the globe, pronunciation course is depicted as a classic, underprepared, and immediate correction. This needs to

change in order to evoke students' motivation in achieving more in pronunciation practice. To do so, teachers carry responsibility to scaffold their students' learning performance by showcasing three related pedagogical actions; yielding a learning environment that empower needed activities and skills to thrive, executing those activities, and encouraging students to burgeon in real life interaction (Walqui in Sardegna&McGregor, 2013).

For the sake of showcasing the three aforementioned related pedagogical actions, whatever teaching methodologies and strategies teacher employs should take student's learning styles into account. No student should be left behind, neither is learning style left unaccommodated. Therefore, this research investigated learning styles students prefer in order to provide suitable teaching approach for them to maximize their language learning.

Every student is unique. One student may be a visual learner and the other is a kinesthetic one. This uniqueness does not stop here but goes beyond their learning styles diversity, be it their level of learning motivation or learning abilities. Yet, only few teachers conduct a pre-class survey or observation to gain a background knowledge of their students. Hence, this study began with a survey to obtain information about student's learning style, how long they have studied English, and sources of their English learning. This aimed to take what learning styles students prefer into consideration when employing certain teaching strategies or approaches.

Learning English pronunciation for EFL students is reasonably challenging. One of the most evident reasons is a monstrous challenge for most students related to vowel sounds which are absent in their native language (Ngunyen et. al., 2021). Color Vowel Approach claimed to be an effective approach for teaching English vowel sounds without the distraction of IPA by The U.S. Department of State's Office of English Language Programs and a couple of previous researches in this field. Having said that, this research employed Color Vowel approach to teach English vowel sounds at Pronunciation Practice course of English Tadris Study Program of State Islamic University Datokarama Palu as an attempt to accommodate students' learning style and prove the claim by conducting observation and triangulated the data gathered from pre-research survey and field notes with the interview result.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning style is the way a learner analyses certain input in learning process or how one executes things (Willingham, 2015). Three most common learning styles are audio, visual, and kinesthetic. Those of audio learners gain information the most by receiving input they can listen to. Others who are visual learners do it with what their eyes can see. And the rest who are kinesthetic internalize any input by activating their bodies while reciting it. A student may apply various learning styles which lead to none of the styles dominate the whole process.

In order to achieve Pronunciation teaching goals, teachers as facilitators are expected to meet students' needs, including the awareness of teachers to employ a certain approach which enables whatever learning style students prefer to thrive. One such approach is Color Vowel.

The Color Vowel approach is employed in teaching and learning American-English vowel sounds' pronunciation with the absence of phonetic symbols and exploits colors and key words to represent the English vowel sounds instead (Taylor,

et al, 2016). Along with its originators, Karen Taylor and Shirley Thompson, Robin Barr transformed a simple, homemade teaching tool into visual representation of sound which is not only pedagogically procurable, but also phonologically solid in 2003. Nowadays, it has become an approach and utilized in numerous TESOL, ESL and literacy programs across the USA. Not only that, The U.S. Department of State's Office of English Language Programs distributes the Color Vowel Chart to English teachers outside the U.S. through Regional English Language Officers.

A couple of researches centered on this issue have been previously conducted. First, Kone et al. (2019) on their research entitled "*The Implementation of Color Vowel Chart to Enhance the EFL Students' Pronunciation at SMPN 1 Majauleng*" strove to figure out whether there was a crucial difference in the pronunciation ability between the eighth-grade students of SMPN 1 Majauleng in the academic year of 2017/2018 who were taught by using the Color Vowel Chart and those who were not. The results showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post- test where the mean score of the pre-test was 78 and the mean score of the post-test was 85. It proves that the Color Vowel Charts crucially elevates the students' pronunciation ability, which is essential for improving students' speaking skills and communicative competence. Second, Syaifullah et al. (2022) in their research entitled *"Using Color Vowel Chart in Teaching Speaking"* aimed to explore information about the Color Vowel Chart including the techniques/strategies, the ways/procedures, and the assessment used in implementing the Color Vowel Chart in teaching speaking. Moreover, they investigated students' speaking achievement. This qualitative research found that the speaking skill of students was enhanced by using the Color Vowel Chart.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research design that narrates learning styles preferred by second semester students of English Tadris Study Program in Islamic State University Datokarama Palu academic year 2021/2022 and how it was taken into account to come up with a teaching approach to level up their learning process in Pronunciation Practice course. The participants of this research amounted to 51 students from 3 different classes. During the research time frame, 8 meetings took place. The researcher took part as the lecturer of the course to better comprehended what actually happened in the class and how the Color Vowel approach accommodate all the students' learning styles. Instruments employed were pre-research survey, field notes through researcher's observation, and interview.

Data of this research was gathered through several rungs, namely (1) collecting background knowledge of students' Pronunciation learning history and students' preferred learning styles through pre-research survey at the first meeting; (2) collecting information or field notes about how Color Vowel approach accommodate students' learning styles through a seven-meeting classroom teaching and observation; and (3) conducting an interview with all the participants to triangulated the data at the eight meeting.

Data analysis was carried out through several steps. They were (1) data collection through survey, field notes, and interview; (2) data reduction, as a process of selecting, focusing, and transforming rough data; (3) data presentation, including descriptions of data extract exposure; and (4) conclusion drawing, where the

researcher concluded and found answer to the addressed problem formulation by considering the results of the instruments and process during the research and connecting them with related theories which are envisaged as references.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

At the first meeting of the course, the researcher conducted a survey to gain information on students' pronunciation learning history. From the survey, it was known that 39% or 20 students had been learning English pronunciation less than 3 years, 37% or 19 students had been doing it for 3 years, and 24% or 12 students said it was more than 3 years.

English is a compulsory subject taught in Junior and High school in Indonesia, including Central Sulawesi province. Taught only for 4 hours a week, English subject gives a small portion of pronunciation exposure to students. That is why all participants answered that they learned pronunciation minimally at that time. The 20 students who answered that they had been learning English pronunciation less than 3 years despite taking the English subject since junior school explained that most of the activities in that subject was reading so they did not take that learning process as pronunciation learning. The same went to those 19 students who answered that they had been learning English pronunciation for 3 years. For the 12 students who answered that they had been learning English pronunciation more than 3 years explained that sometimes their teacher focused on speaking activities so that was counted as pronunciation learning process.

88,2% of the total participants or 45 students stated that they learned English pronunciation leisurely by listening to English songs or watching English-speaking movies during their high school period and started doing it purposively and more seriously when being students of English Tadris study program. They argued that audio-visual inputs for learning including songs and movies ease them to acquire knowledge about English pronunciation since they are relaxed and the activities are fun.
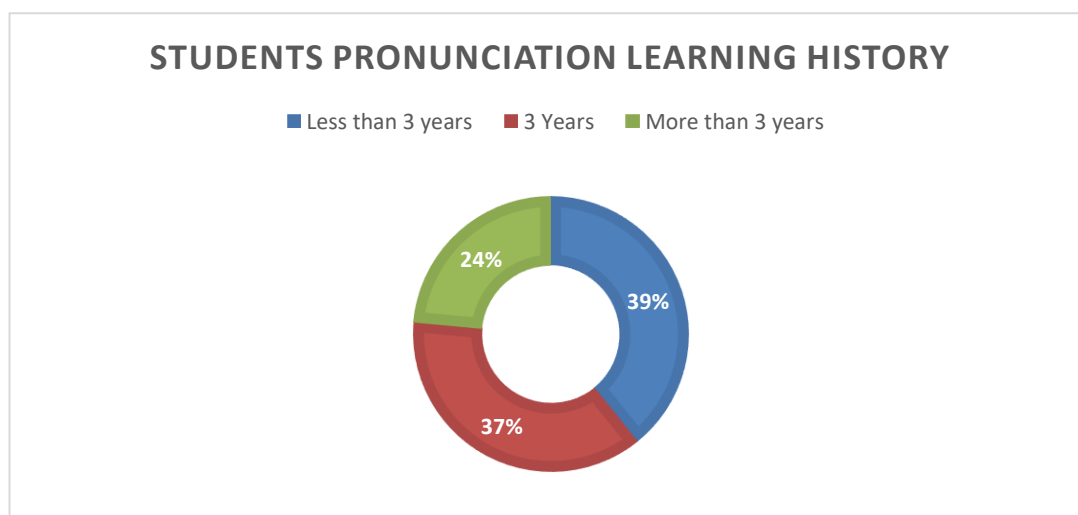
STUDENTS PRONUNCIATION LEARNING HISTORY

■ Less than 3 years ■ 3 Years ■ More than 3 years

24%

39%

37%

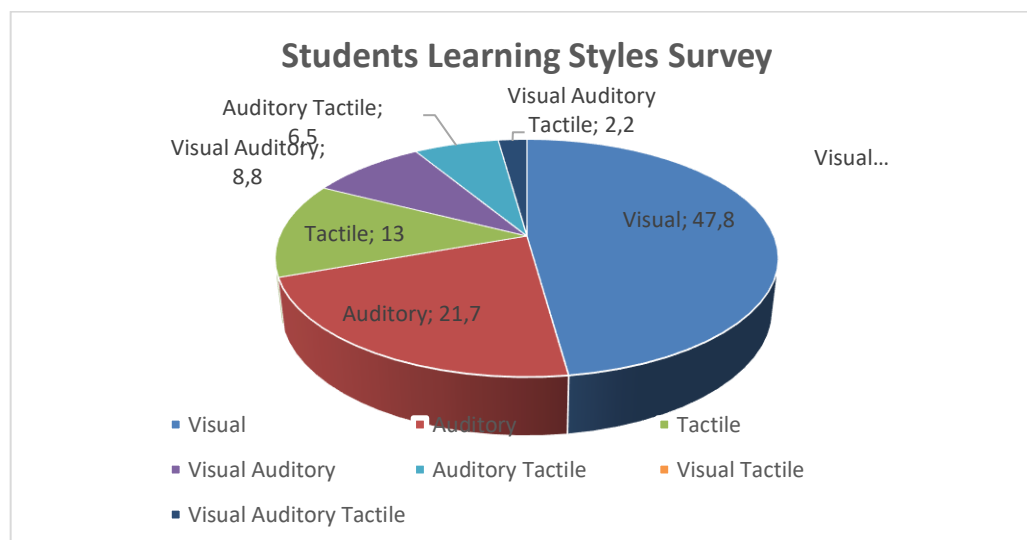**Figure 1**. Students Pronunciation Learning History

Figure 2. Students Learning Styles Survey

Students were also asked to fill a survey about their learning style. The survey was designed by University of California, Merced. It consists of 24 statements about how students perceive input and what learning style is best to maximize their learning output.

When one scores more on visual, that means he visualizes information and then processes it. When one scores more on auditory, that means he benefits from listening to information. When one scores more on tactile or kinesthetic, that means he learns by doing. There are cases when no single learning style is dominant, and that means one combines learning styles to achieve maximum learning output.

From the survey calculation, data was obtained where it showed that (a) 47,8% of the participants were visual with the total amount 22 students; (b) 21,7% were auditory with 10 students; (c) 13% were tactile with 6 students; (d) 8,8% were visual auditory with 4 students; (e) 6,5% were auditory tactile with 3 students; and (f) 2,2% were visual-auditory-tactile with 1 student. Based on this finding, the researcher who was also the lecturer of the course decided to apply the Color Vowel approach to teach Pronunciation because it met all learning styles preferred by the students.

As it was shown above, there were students who learned best by employing more than one learning styles, such as stated on part d,e, and f, where students were classified into visual auditory, auditory tactile, and visual-auditory-tactile respectively. In the case of 2 learning styles are combined, that means the dominance of each learning style is equally 50%. While in the case of 3 learning styles are combined, the dominance of each learning style is divided into 3 so each takes 33,33%.

From the second to the seventh meeting, the researcher employed a Color Vowel chart to introduce English vowels and how they are represented by the color. The sounds of the English vowels are grouped into 15 colors which resemble sounds of vowels and diphthongs in English. Green represents [i] sound, that means everything in green should be pronounced with a long i sound or the other way around. Contrast to green, silver represents [I] sound, which means anything colored in silver should be pronounced with short I sound. Red represents [ɛ], black

represents [æ], purple represents [ɚ], mustard represents [ʌ], olive represents [ɑ], auburn represents [o], blue represents [u̲], and wooden represents [ʊ̲]. For diphthong sounds, rose represents [oʊ̲], turquoise represents [oI], gray represents [ɛI], white represents [ʌI], and brown represents [ʌʊ̲]. Note that the vowel sounds these colors represent are not necessarily the first vowel sound of the color, but rather those of stressed syllable one like in turquoise.

Each meeting lasted for 100 minutes. In each meeting, three phases of learning were carried out; introduction to English vowels, pronunciation practice, and a review to conclude the class. During the introduction session which lasted for 30 minutes, a color vowel chart was employed to introduce 2 or 3 English vowels. The vowels were limited to a small number to help the students focused and internalize the input in their long-term memories. Then in the second session which lasted for 60 minutes, flashcards equipped with colorful images were employed to suit those who were visual learners. The Color Vowel flashcard is a two-side card where a colorful picture is shown in one side and the name of the thing in the picture is put at the other side. The color helps the students to guess the correct pronunciation and later is confirmed by what is written at the other side of the card. Videos and games were played to suit those who were audio and tactile learners as well. Color Vowel approach provides the videos with songs and special games where the students can move their hands and body while reciting the colors to practice their pronunciation. This session was dedicated to accommodate all the learning styles of all students in the class that amounted to 17 students. At the end, the researcher concluded the class by asking students whether all topics discussed were well understood and how they felt during the process.

Figure 3. Color Vowel Chart

At the eighth meeting, an interview took place. Students were asked how they felt during the learning process and whether the Color Vowel approach accommodate their learning styles to better obtain the learning input and maximize their learning output. The answer to the first questions varied from feeling good, relaxed, happy, and joyous, which all is positive. Students elaborated their answer by saying that they did not feel like learning in formal class but rather playing with their peers and lecturer. While for the second question, all students answered that their learning styles were accommodated by the Color Vowel approach since the conducted

activities varied from using flashcards to videos and games. They elaborated their answers by saying they were equally given chances to learn according to their styles so they were optimistic that their learning output will be satisfying.

CONCLUSION

From the research findings, it is evident that pre-class survey is pivotal to determine which approach should be employed in teaching, especially in Pronunciation Practice class. That helps teacher, lecturer and educator to gain insight and better prepare their classes to meet students' needs as well as accommodate their learning styles to maximize their learning process. Such approach is the Color Vowel approach. Since most of the students are visual learners, the use of flashcards, video, and games employed in Color Vowel approach helped them internalize the learning input. Not only that, it helped the students to easily comprehend material being taught as well as yielded a relaxed learning environment where students could learn best.

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