

What EFL Learners Say about YouTube Use to Improve Pronunciation in a Blended Learning Environment

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Abstract

YouTube is the most widely accessed video-sharing platform in the world. It offers not only millions of videos of music, movie, sport, talk shows, and news but also educational videos. Today's students generally like YouTube. Therefore, it offers great opportunities for students and teachers to enhance EFL learning and teaching, including pronunciation improvement. This article is part of a larger study on EFL learners' perception of using YouTube to improve English pronunciation in a blended learning environment. It employed the explanatory sequential mixed methods design and involved 26 freshmen majoring in Management at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. Data was collected using a questionnaire and interview. The results showed that: (1) the participants were so familiar with YouTube and encountered no difficulty to access and use it; (2) a majority of the participants found YouTube interesting and fun; (3) the participants viewed learning with YouTube advantageous because it presents the instructional materials in letters, sounds, and pictures at once; and (4) most participants found YouTube interesting and motivating, and thus it improved their pronunciation skills.

Keywords: *blended learning, Edmodo, pronunciation, YouTube*

INTRODUCTION

A large number of studies have shown the crucial importance of English pronunciation in English oral communication. This is shown by the fact that although a speaker commits some mistakes in vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics, with acceptable pronunciation, he is still understandable. But, despite being accurate in other areas, with bad pronunciation, a speaker's expression would be very difficult to understand. According to Adams-Goertel (2013), every EFL learner or non-native speaker needs to acquire proper pronunciation distinguish meanings or to produce comprehensible utterances. In other words, a good mastery of pronunciation increases EFL learner's or speaker's intelligibility and listening comprehension. Julia (2002) stated that without pronunciation there would be no spoken language and no oral communication.

Hişmanoğlu (2006, p. 101) highlighted that pronunciation is “a key to gaining full communicative competence”.

Despite its importance, pronunciation is the most difficult skill to master by EFL learners due to some causes. First, EFL learners lack contact with English native speakers so that they are provided with minimal exposure to English sounds. Second, pronunciation instruction has long been neglected in EFL teaching because EFL teachers often feel that they are inadequately prepared to teach it; pronunciation instruction is inappropriately emphasized in curricula, and appropriate materials for teaching pronunciation are often unobtainable (Fraser, 2000; Macdonald, 2003).

Due to its high importance, current studies have revealed that pronunciation should be treated as an integral part of EFL learning and teaching. However, the realistic goal of EFL pronunciation instruction is not to acquire such ‘perfect’ pronunciation but to produce a comprehensible and intelligible speech (Gilakjani, 2012). The overall aim of EFL pronunciation instruction is to develop students’ spoken English that is easy to understand, serves his individual needs, and allows a positive image of himself as a speaker of a foreign language. To achieve them, Pardede’s (2010) literature review recommends teaching pronunciation in a meaningful and motivating way.

One of the learning media that can provide students with authentic, meaningful and motivating input videos. Such videos are available on YouTube. However, although many studies (Menulty & Lazaveric, 2012; Shrosbree, 2008) have been conducted on the use of videos, studies exploring the use of YouTube in pronunciation learning are very rare. This article was written as an attempt to fill in the gaps in the literature. It focuses on EFL students’ perception of the use of YouTube to develop English pronunciation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation in EFL Context

Pronunciation plays a significant role to achieve intelligible oral communication, and the results of current studies (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Thomson & Derwing, 2014) have revealed that pronunciation instruction results in improvement. Therefore, more and more researchers and language educators (Cook, 2009; Fraser, 2000; Jenkins, 2000; Macdonald, 2002; Otlowski, 1998) have insisted on treating pronunciation a focus in EFL instruction. Despite this widening consensus, however, EFL pronunciation teaching is currently less than optimally effective particularly because of the lack of suitable instruction that meets students' needs, level, and ability (Nikbakht, 2001).

To make pronunciation more effective, the results of studies have emerged two teaching approaches. First, the 'bottom-up approach', which begins with the articulation of individual sounds or phonemes proceeds towards stress, rhythm, tone, and intonation. Second, the 'top-down approach', which begins with intonation patterns and then takes separate sounds or phonemes into sharper focus if required (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Since the 'bottom-up approach' emphasizes on isolated sounds it may enable learners to produce sounds that are close to native' pronunciation. However current studies indicated that the ‘top-down approach’ is more effective to enable EFL learners to communicate with proper pronunciation (Gilbert, 1984).

To help teachers assist EFL learners to improve their pronunciation, various influential pronunciation researchers have suggested some teaching techniques and activities. Oxford (2000) suggested using some useful communication strategies, like retrieval strategies, cover strategies, rehearsal strategies, which will help learners get the impression that their pronunciation is better than it is. Maniruzzaman (2007) offered some

techniques, such as explanation, utilization of known sounds, modeling and individual correction, self-monitoring and self-correction, and reading aloud. Along with the advance of information and communication technology, using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is also proposed to provide learners the opportunity to be more autonomous in learning. CALL allows learners to hear their errors and mistakes and see both segmental and supra-segmental graphic representations (Neri et al., 2002).

ESL/EFL learners need computer-based materials for learning pronunciation and teachers also use these materials as an effective means of improving their teaching (Fraser, 2000).

Blended Learning

Since blended learning (BL) is a relatively new advance in educational practice but is directly implemented in various settings and places and is studied by various researchers in different settings, available definitions in the literature describe it in multiple ways. The wide variety of definitions, however, is just variations of a few common themes (Pardede, 2012). Elearnspace (2005) summed up the available definitions by stating that BL is a learning system or environment which takes the best of both face-to-face and online learning and creates an improved learning experience for the student. This is supported by Friesen (2012) who highlighted that from 2006 to the present, BL has been viewed as a combination of face-to-face and technology-mediated instructional forms and practices. In the same vein, Garrison & Vaughan (2008: p. 42), accentuated that "The basic principle of blended learning is that face-to-face oral communication and online written communication are optimally integrated such that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience congruent with the context and intended educational purpose."

BL is essentially not new in the field of language learning and teaching. The application of CALL, which blends information and computer technology applications with face-to-face teaching and learning is essentially blended learning (Pardede, 2012). Various recent studies have shown that BL offers powerful potentials to succeed language learners. Marsh (2012) listed nine strengths of blended language learning. First, it offers a more individualized learning experience. Second, it accommodates more personalized learning support. Third, it supports and encourages independent and collaborative learning. Fourth, it increases student learning engagement. Fifth, it facilitates a variety of learning styles. Sixth, it provides opportunities to practice the target language beyond the classroom. Seventh, it facilitates a less stressful practice environment for the target language. Eighth, it offers flexible study, anytime or anywhere, to meet learners' needs. Finally, it facilitates learners to develop valuable and essential 21st-century learning skills.

Edmodo

Edmodo is of the most widely used social media today in EFL. Due to its similarity with Facebook in many features, this online learning site is usually called as "Facebook for Education". However, Edmodo was designed to provide a closed, private platform for the users (students and teachers) to collaborate, share content, and leverage educational apps to augment in-classroom learning (Business Wire, 2014), it protects the users' privacy and security. Although it was just launched in 2008, Edmodo, millions of users worldwide, including teachers, students, and parents have been using it. In March 2016, over 63 million users actively work together using Edmodo concerning academic affairs (Edmodo, 2016). Its popularity and effectiveness has even made it elected by 500

professionals from 48 countries as one of the best complementary tool for learning on the internet (Enriquez, 2014),

Some of its features enable Edmodo to be employed as an effective content management system and integrated learning (Cheong, 2010). It can also be easily used as learning management (LMS) system to develop a blended learning environment. Utilizing Edmodo, teachers can plan lessons that include texts, audio, and video files. With Edmodo, students can learn the online materials, share content, submit homework, assignments, and quizzes, and receive their teacher's feedback, notes, and alerts as well as voting on polls (Jarc, 2010) via tablet, computer, or smartphone. Later, in the in-class sessions, they engage in discussions, projects, and training.

Pardede's (2017) review of current studies revealed the following. First, Edmodo is an effective educational tool to improve the students' four language skills and grammar. Second, the use of Edmodo significantly enhanced students' learning motivation, autonomy, and responsibility. It also augmented students' engagement in learning activities, promoted their interaction with peers and teachers, and developed the classroom dynamics. Third, a majority of the participants in the studies had a positive perception of Edmodo. Finally, the participants regarded Edmodo as a tool which is user-friendly, flexible, and easy to adapt to various learning approach.

YouTube

YouTube is the most widely accessed video-sharing platform in the world. Internet users access it to watch, upload or download videos. It does not only provides music, movie, sport, talk shows, and news but also education matters such as pronunciation and speaking videos. Most internet users, particularly today's students, have a YouTube account. Therefore, employing this platform offers teachers a great opportunity to maximize students' learning. Through the videos on YouTube, students can fully engage and be interested in developing their English performance. It is regarded as a support to students, teachers and educational institutions in the learning and teaching process. Educational videos on YouTube can also be as good as an instructor in communicating facts or demonstrating procedures to bridge between the process of learning and teaching. They facilitate students to develop their language skills through social networks or other communication tools and to exchange information with other EFL learners worldwide. Tarnopolsky and Degtiariova (2003) approved that videos offer opportunities for students to listen, see and observe how native speakers act and speak. This obviously will help them practice more on their language skills, including pronunciation.

Current studies on the use of YouTube in learning (Burke & Snyder, 2008; Clifton & Mann, 2011; Jaffar, 2012; Lee & Liang (2012); Orús, et.all, 2016; Styati, 2016) revealed positive impacts for students on motivation in studying certain subjects, in promoting engagement, and in developing listening, speaking, writing and vocabulary. Additionally, in university English learning, Kelsen (2009) reported that YouTube was found to be a source of interesting, relevant and beneficial supplementary materials.

METHOD

This article is part of a larger study on EFL learners' perception of using YouTube to improve English pronunciation in a blended learning environment. The study employed the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, in which the quantitative data was collected and analyzed first and then the qualitative data was collected to help explain or elaborate the previously obtained quantitative results (Pardede, 2018). The study involved

26 freshmen majoring in Management at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia, who were attending a General English class in the first semester of 2017/2018 Academic Year. The pronunciation development was conducted due to the student's expectation to improve their English pronunciation. In their opinion, their poor pronunciation always hindered them to express ideas in conversation. Therefore, they wished to have special activities for developing their English pronunciation.

The General English Class was conducted once a week in 90 minutes per session. Since students needed to finish studying the materials covered in the syllabus, it seemed very difficult to run the special pronunciation program. To overcome the problem, especially the time restriction, the lecturer offered to conduct the pronunciation development in a blended learning environment, and the class committed to taking it. The procedure of the program was as follows. In the last 15 minutes of each session, the class practiced English pronunciation in face-to-face instruction using Smith's (2015) as the main source of materials. Each session started by watching the accompanying videos available on YouTube. After watching a video twice, brief explanations and practices in small groups were carried out by employing the texts in the book. Each face-to-face session usually finished two videos. After the face-to-face session, further pronunciation activities were conducted online through Edmodo employed as the LMS. In Edmodo, the links of the videos had been provided so that the students could access and practice with the two videos having been used in the face-to-face session and two other videos to be used in the following face-to-face session. Since the students had one week to learn in Edmodo, they were suggested to visit the site several times for practicing with videos, studying the accompanying handouts, taking a quiz, sharing ideas and discussing.

In this study, the quantitative data were collected employing a questionnaire, while the qualitative data was collected through interviews. The questionnaire employed in the study consists of 35 items aimed to gauge information concerning the participants' perception of using YouTube videos and Edmodo to improve pronunciation. However, the items of the questionnaire included in this article include only 18 items particularly related to the use of YouTube. The qualitative data included in the articles was also limited only to the interviewees' responses concerning YouTube.

The 18 items of the questionnaire included in this report gauged the participants' perception in terms of the accessibility, practicality, and usefulness of YouTube in pronunciation improvement. The 18 statements were responded by the participants by selecting one out of the four options: 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), and 1 (strongly disagree). The questionnaire was administered to the whole students in the General English Class in the third week before the end of the semester. In the final week of the semester, after the quantitative data were analyzed, five students were randomly selected to participate in the interview. The interview was directed to obtain information needed to help explain or elaborate the previously obtained quantitative results.

FINDINGS

Perception of YouTube's Accessibility

As shown in Table 1, a majority of the participants responded positively to the accessibility of YouTube videos employed in their pronunciation learning. All of them had a YouTube account and almost three-fourth found no problem to access them, although 38.5% of them were unable to practice pronunciation using the videos anytime and anywhere. Overall, 78% of them had a positive view of YouTube's accessibility.

The finding concerning the positive view of the participants on YouTube's accessibility was clarified by the qualitative data obtained through the interview. All of the five interviewees stated they had no problem to access YouTube videos anytime and anywhere because when they were in secondary school, they were used to play the media to look for information or watch movies. The only problem was when they had no internet connection.

Table 1
Student's Perception of YouTube's Accessibility (n= 26)

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I have a YouTube account	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	100
2	I found no problem to access YouTube	2	7,7	5	19,2	10	38,5	9	34,6
3	I could access the provided YouTube videos anytime and anywhere	3	11,5	5	19,2	10	38,5	8	30,8
4	YouTube enabled me to practice pronunciation anytime and anywhere	4	15,4	6	23,1	9	34,6	7	26,9
	Total	10	34,6	16	61,5	29	111,5	49	192,3
	Mean	2.5	8,7	4	15,4	7.3	27,9	12	48,1

“Well, I have been accessing YouTube for five years. I found no problem to access it. The only problem for me is when a run out of internet data package. Now I access it through my smartphone. So, I can play the video anytime I want to.” (Interviewee A)

Yes, it's easy to access. I even have got a YouTube account for some years. Now I can access it whenever I want to by means of my handphone, and this makes me able to practice with the videos whenever I want to.” (Interviewee C)

I got no problem at all to access YouTube, except when I don't have an internet connection. I have been using it for four years. I like using YouTube to increase my pronunciation because I can access it by using my smartphone.” (Interviewee D)

Perception of YouTube's Practicality

Table 2 shows that the participants' positive perception of YouTube's practicality was a bit higher than its accessibility. More than 80% of them viewed registering on YouTube and following the instruction easy. A majority (82.1%) of them considered YouTube made pronunciation easier to learn. Overall, 86% of them had a positive view of YouTube's practicality.

I like learning pronunciation using YouTube because the instructions are easy to follow. The host in the video, on purpose, speaks very clearly. So the explanations are easy to understand and the practices are easy to do.” (Interviewee B).

The videos we used in the pronunciation practice are easy to follow. The use of Edmodo where we got the links of the video was also helpful because I can discuss with my classmates about the material in the video. I like it very much.” (Interviewee C).

Table 2
Student's Perception of YouTube's Practicality (n= 26)

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Registering on YouTube is easy	0	0	3	11,5	14	53,8	9	34,6
2	The instructions on YouTube are easy to follow	1	3,8	2	7,7	15	57,7	8	30,8
3	The pronunciation tips in the videos are easy to do	1	3,8	3	11,5	14	53,8	8	30,8
4	The use of videos makes pronunciation easier to learn	2	7,1	3	10,7	13	46,4	10	35,7
Total		4	14,8	11	41,5	56	211,8	35	131,9
Mean		1	3,7	2,75	10,4	14	53	8,75	33,

Perception of YouTube's Usefulness

Table 3 shows that the majority of the participants had a positive perception of the usefulness of YouTube in learning pronunciation. More than 80% of them were committed to practice with all the suggested videos because they helped them improve their pronunciation. Overall, 82.4% of them viewed YouTube useful for improving pronunciation.

Table 3
Student's Perception of YouTube's Usefulness (n= 26)

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I studied all the suggested YouTube videos	2	7,7	4	15,4	12	46,2	8	30,8
2	Learning using the videos made my pronunciation skills improved	1	3,8	3	11,5	12	46,2	10	38,5
3	The YouTube videos enlarged my knowledge of English pronunciation	1	3,8	3	11,5	12	46,2	10	38,5
4	The model in YouTube helped me practice pronunciation skills	1	3,8	3	11,5	12	46,2	10	38,5
5	The explanation in YouTube is easy to understand	1	3,8	4	15,4	12	46,2	9	34,6
Total		6	23,1	17	65,4	60	230,8	47	180,8
Mean		1,2	4,6	3,4	13,1	12	46,2	9,4	36,2

Yes, I think YouTube is useful to increase English pronunciation. The explanations in the videos are easy to understand. Moreover, the videos present a good model for producing correct English sounds and accents. It's wonderful! (Interviewee A).

I think my English pronunciation improves after practicing by following the lessons from the videos. The videos include texts, sounds, and images at once. It's really advantageous to learn with them." (Interviewee C).

I know English pronunciation improves much better after following the instructions from the YouTube videos. They also enable me to practice saying English expressions with appropriate sounds." (Interviewee D).

Perception of Interest in YouTube

In terms of interest, Table 4 shows that a majority of the participants viewed YouTube as an interesting media for developing pronunciation. More than 80% of them enjoyed and

always repeated practicing pronunciation utilizing YouTube videos because they were interesting. They were even committed to proceed using YouTube to improve their English pronunciation.

Table 4
Student's Perception of Interest in YouTube (n=26)

No	Statement	SD		D		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I enjoy learning pronunciation using YouTube videos	1	3,8	3	11,5	12	46,2	10	38,5
2	Learning pronunciation through YouTube is interesting	1	3,8	3	11,5	12	46,2	10	38,5
3	I will continue to learn using YouTube videos	2	7,7	5	19,2	11	42,3	8	30,8
4	I always repeated practicing pronunciation exercises provided in the YouTube	2	7,7	5	19,2	10	38,5	9	34,6
5	I never get bored practicing pronunciation with YouTube	2	7,7	6	23,1	10	38,5	8	30,8
	Total	8	30,8	22	84,6	55	211,5	45	173,1
	Mean	1,6	6,2	4,4	16,9	11	42,3	9	34,6

Learning pronunciation with YouTube is fun and comfortable and motivating. I like it because I don't feel stressed while learning with videos. Using them, I can start practicing alone, and when I'm quite fluent, I can practice with friends. The videos really motivate me to improve my pronunciation. (Interviewee B).

The pronunciation videos on YouTube are interesting. The materials are not difficult to understand and it's fun to practice with them. Although the pronunciation development in the class, I think, I will continue practicing with other videos on YouTube. I have searched and found many other interesting videos." (Interviewee C).

YouTube is an interesting media to learn with. The explanation and examples in the video are not complicated. The speaker does not speak quickly. I can catch what she means and repeat what she says." (Interviewee E).

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the students were familiar with YouTube and a majority experienced no problem in accessing and using it. Having no internet connection is the factor that could cause a problem to them. They had also accessed YouTube for entertainment, looking for information, or learning to do something.

A majority of the participants found the videos in YouTube interesting and fun. As a result, they like learning and practicing pronunciation using them. This is supported by Fleck, Beckman, Stern, and Hussey (2014) who asserted that students viewed using YouTube entertaining, interesting, and fun. Combining this finding with the previous one, that students are familiar with YouTube, it is obvious that if it is employed properly YouTube offers a great opportunity for students to optimize their learning. What is more effective to facilitate learning if not the media that students like and are skillful to use?

Most of the participants found that learning with YouTube is advantageous because the videos provide letters, sound, and pictures at once. This makes the materials and the exercises easy to understand and to practice because the students were able to see, hear

and produce the required skills. This is in line with the finding of Zahn et al (2010) that learning with multimedia tools like videos is effective for learning activities. According to Lindstorm (1994), students who saw heard and produced materials during an instruction got higher (75%) level of understanding of the subject as compared to those who only saw (20%) and saw and heard only (40%) during the instruction.

Another important finding is that YouTube can be interesting and motivating to most students in general and introvert students in particular. They can start learning and practicing in private. In this way, they can focus on learning and practicing without being worried to be laughed at. After having appropriate confidence, they can proceed to practice with other students. Having such an opportunity, they managed to improve their pronunciation. This finding clarified the finding of Zaidi et al. (2018) indicating that YouTube could be interesting to motivate students and increase students' pronunciation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion above four conclusions were drawn. First, the participants were so familiar with YouTube that they encountered no difficulty to access and use it. Second, a majority of the participants found YouTube interesting and fun, so that they liked learning and practicing pronunciation using them. Third, learning with YouTube is advantageous to the participants because the instructional materials are presented in letters, sounds, and pictures at once. Finally, most participants found YouTube interesting and motivating, and thus it improved their pronunciation skills.

This study aimed at exploring students' perception of using YouTube to enhance pronunciation in terms of accessibility, practicality, usefulness, and interest. Further studies are recommended to cover other relevant aspects of perception of the use of YouTube to provide more comprehensive results. Moreover, the study involved only a limited number of participants belonging to a university. This makes the results unable to be generalized. Therefore, future studies are recommended to cover a bigger number of participants from various educational institutions.

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