Teachers' Perception of Tongue Twisters in Teaching Phonology and Listening

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of using tongue twisters in teaching phonology and listening in an EFL context. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through a semi-structured interview with an English teacher who had experience implementing tongue twisters in pronunciation and listening classes. The findings reveal that the teacher perceives tongue twisters as an effective tool for enhancing phonological awareness, improving articulation, and increasing students' sensitivity to phonemic contrasts. The teacher also believes that tongue twisters support listening development by strengthening learners' ability to discriminate minimal pairs, recognize stress and rhythm patterns, and attend to detailed sound differences. Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified, including students' shyness, difficulties in selecting level-appropriate tongue twisters, limited class time, and learners' tendency to prioritize speed over accuracy. Overall, the results indicate that tongue twisters serve as a motivating and practical strategy that links pronunciation and listening practice, although their success depends on careful planning and pedagogical adaptation. The study highlights the need for teacher training in pronunciation pedagogy and suggests integrating tongue twisters with other phonological and listening activities to optimize learning outcomes.

Keywords: *listening, teacher's perception, tongue twisters, phonology.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi guru terhadap penggunaan Latihan lidah dalam pengajaran fonologi dan mendengarkan dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan seorang guru bahasa Inggris yang memiliki pengalaman menerapkan Latihan lidah dalam kelas pengucapan dan mendengarkan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menganggap Latihan lidah sebagai alat yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kesadaran fonologis, memperbaiki artikulasi, dan meningkatkan kepekaan siswa terhadap kontras fonemik. Guru tersebut juga percaya bahwa Latihan lidah mendukung perkembangan mendengarkan dengan memperkuat kemampuan siswa untuk membedakan pasangan minimal, mengenali pola tekanan dan ritme, serta memperhatikan perbedaan suara yang detail. Meskipun demikian, beberapa tantangan teridentifikasi, termasuk rasa malu siswa, kesulitan dalam memilih Latihan lidah yang sesuai tingkat, waktu kelas yang terbatas, dan kecenderungan siswa untuk memprioritaskan kecepatan daripada ketepatan. Secara keseluruhan, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Latihan lidah berfungsi sebagai strategi yang motivatif dan praktis yang menghubungkan latihan pengucapan dan pendengaran, meskipun keberhasilannya bergantung pada perencanaan yang cermat dan adaptasi pedagogis. Studi ini menyoroti kebutuhan akan pelatihan guru dalam pedagogi pengucapan dan menyarankan untuk mengintegrasikan Latihan lidah dengan aktivitas fonologis dan pendengaran lainnya untuk mengoptimalkan hasil belajar.

Kata kunci*: mendengarkan, persepsi guru, latihan lidah, fonologi.*

A. Introduction

Teaching phonology and listening is a crucial component of English language instruction, as these skills form the foundation of learners' overall communicative competence. Phonology enables students to recognize, produce, and differentiate sounds, while listening skills allow them to process spoken input effectively. However, many teachers face challenges in helping students master these skills due to limited exposure, low motivation, and difficulties in distinguishing similar sounds. To address these challenges, educators often integrate innovative and engaging techniques, one of which is the use of tongue twisters.

Tongue twisters are short, repetitive, and rhythmic phrases designed to challenge the articulatory muscles and promote clear pronunciation. According to Kelly (2000), pronunciation practice that is meaningful, repetitive, and fun can significantly strengthen learners' phonological awareness. Similarly, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that engaging oral drills, such as tongue twisters, can improve learners' ability to produce sounds accurately and develop better listening discrimination. Through repetition and speed variation, tongue twisters enhance articulatory precision and train learners' auditory sensitivity to phonological differences.

Despite these potential advantages, the effectiveness of tongue twisters depends greatly on teachers' perception and the way they integrate them into instruction. Teachers' beliefs strongly shape instructional decisions and teaching behaviors (Borg, 2006). If teachers perceive tongue twisters as beneficial, enjoyable, and pedagogically useful, they are more likely to implement them consistently in phonology and listening lessons. On the other hand, if teachers view tongue twisters as time-consuming, difficult to manage, or irrelevant to learning objectives, they may avoid using them.

In many EFL classrooms, especially in contexts where learners rarely use English in daily communication, teachers struggle to find effective techniques to enhance phonological awareness and listening comprehension. While tongue twisters have been recognized as a practical tool for pronunciation and auditory training, it is still unclear how teachers perceive their usefulness, what benefits they experience, and what challenges arise during implementation. Teachers may face constraints such as limited class time, student shyness, difficulty selecting suitable tongue twisters, or a lack of pedagogical training in integrating them meaningfully. Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions is essential to determine the practicality and relevance of using tongue twisters in real teaching contexts.

Several previous studies have explored the use of tongue twisters in language learning. Puspita (2019) found that tongue twisters improved students' articulation and confidence in speaking. Similarly, Rahmawati & Faridi (2020) reported that tongue twisters enhanced learners' listening discrimination, especially in identifying minimal pairs. Another study by Sari (2021) highlighted that students enjoyed using tongue twisters and perceived them as a fun way to learn pronunciation. However, these studies predominantly focused on students' outcomes or the effectiveness of tongue twisters as a technique. Very few studies specifically examined teachers' perceptions, especially regarding how they view tongue twisters in both phonology and listening instruction. Moreover, research on the challenges or constraints teachers face during implementation remains limited.

While existing research confirms the pedagogical benefits of tongue twisters, there is insufficient information about how teachers perceive this technique, how often they use it, and what practical issues arise in the classroom. Most studies do not address teachers' viewpoints regarding the dual use of tongue twisters in phonology and listening, nor do they explore the challenges and benefits experienced from the teacher's perspective. This gap makes it important to conduct research that focuses on teachers' insights, experiences, and judgments about the role of tongue twisters in language instruction. Based on the explanations, there

are some importance of research questions 1.) What is teacher's perception of using tongue twisters in teaching phonology. 2.) What is teacher's perception of using tongue twisters in teaching listening. 3.) What the challenges and benefits experienced by teacher in implementing tongue twisters in the learning process. This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of using tongue twisters in teaching phonology and listening. Specifically, the research has the objectives, to explore teacher's perception of using tongue twisters in teaching phonology. To explore teachers' perceptions of using tongue twisters in teaching listening. To identify the challenges and benefits experienced by teachers in implementing tongue twisters during the learning process. Through this study, it is expected that insights into teachers' beliefs, classroom experiences, and instructional considerations will contribute to developing more effective and engaging strategies for teaching phonology and listening.

Teachers' perception

Teachers' perception refers to teachers' beliefs, attitudes, interpretations, and judgments about instructional methods, classroom practices, learners' abilities, and educational innovations. In the context of language education, perceptions influence how teachers plan lessons, choose strategies, respond to challenges, and adopt new teaching methods (Borg, 2015). Teachers' perceptions are shaped by prior experiences as learners, teacher education, professional development, institutional expectations, and classroom realities (Richardson, 1996). Because teachers act as decision makers, their perceptions play a central role in determining whether a teaching strategy will be implemented effectively or resisted.

Literature consistently highlights that educational reforms or innovations succeed only when teachers perceive them as meaningful, practical, and aligned with their teaching context (Fullan, 2007). Positive teacher perceptions are strongly associated with instructional effectiveness, student engagement, and willingness to integrate new methods. Conversely, negative perceptions can become barriers that limit the adoption of new pedagogical approaches, even when research supports their effectiveness (Pajares, 1992). Understanding teachers' perceptions helps researchers and policymakers identify factors that support or hinder change, particularly in areas such as pronunciation instruction, classroom technology integration, or alternative strategies like tongue twisters.

Tongue twisters

Tongue twisters have long been used in language classrooms as a playful yet effective tool for developing learners' phonological accuracy and oral fluency. In pronunciation pedagogy, tongue twisters are considered a form of articulatory drill that promotes precise control of speech organs through repeated, rapid alternation of similar phonemes (Celce at all, 2010). Because they isolate problematic sound contrasts such as /θ/–/t/, /l/–/r/, or fricative clusters tongue twisters provide focused segmental practice that enhances learners' awareness of phonemic distinctions. This aligns with research showing that increased articulatory practice strengthens learners' phonological representations, which in turn supports clearer and more intelligible speech (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Empirical studies have shown positive effects of tongue twister activities on learners' pronunciation performance. For instance, (Sugiharto, 2022) found that Indonesian EFL students demonstrated improved segmental accuracy and greater fluency after several weeks of structured tongue twister practice. Similarly, (Maulida, 2018) reported that tongue twisters increased learners' confidence and accuracy in producing English consonant clusters. These findings align with the motor learning perspective, which argues that repeated, high-precision articulation can lead to automatization and improved speech production (Lee & Genovese, 2014). The use of tongue twisters as a tool for teaching English pronunciation at the primary school level. (Abdujabborova, P.P., & Shodiyeva, S, 2024)

Beyond production, tongue twisters may also support listening skills. Because

they highlight minimal contrasts and phonological patterns, these activities can enhance learners' perception of smaller sound differences. Studies on the perception production relationship suggest that improved articulatory control can enhance speech perception by strengthening phonological categories (Trofimovich & Baker, 2006). Teachers often report that learners become more attentive to sound distinctions in listening tasks after tongue twister practice (Avriyanti, 2023), though more controlled research is needed to establish direct causal effects.

Despite their benefits, tongue twisters should not be used in isolation. Researchers emphasize that pronunciation gains are most effective when tongue twisters are integrated with listening discrimination tasks, contextual speaking activities, and explicit phonological instruction (Kissling, 2013). Overall, the literature suggests that tongue twisters are a valuable, low cost technique that can enhance phonological awareness, pronunciation accuracy, and potentially listening skills when implemented strategically.

Phonology

Phonology, the study of the sound system of a language, plays a critical role in English language teaching, particularly for developing listening comprehension and speaking accuracy. Phonological awareness involves understanding how phonemes, stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns function in a language, allowing learners to recognize and produce meaningful speech units (Celce at all, 2010). In second language acquisition, phonological competence is closely linked to listening proficiency because the ability to recognize spoken input depends on recognizing phonological patterns and contrasts in real-time speech (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Listening is not merely passive reception, it is an active cognitive process that requires the listener to parse acoustic input, map it into phonological representations, and integrate it with linguistic and contextual knowledge (Field, 2008). Research has shown that learners

often struggle with listening tasks when they have limited phonological knowledge, particularly in distinguishing minimal pairs, stress patterns, or connected speech phenomena such as elision and assimilation (Saito, 2012). Consequently, phonology focused instruction has been emphasized as a strategy to improve both listening comprehension and oral production.

Empirical studies suggest that phonological training, such as targeted practice with vowel and consonant contrasts, stress patterns, and intonation contours, enhances learners' listening abilities. For instance, (Trofimovich and Baker, 2006) found that learners who received explicit pronunciation instruction demonstrated improved perception of L2 sounds and better listening discrimination skills. Similarly, (Lee, 2014) noted that attention to prosodic features, such as sentence stress and rhythm, allowed learners to segment speech more accurately, facilitating comprehension in real-world listening tasks.

Phonology & Listening

Integration of phonology and listening instruction is particularly effective when combined with meaningful communicative activities. Techniques such as minimal pair drills, shadowing, repetition of natural phrases, and the use of tongue twisters have been recommended to link perception and production (Kissling, 2013). These activities reinforce learners' awareness of phonological patterns while simultaneously training their auditory discrimination skills, which is essential for listening fluency.

The Relationship between Tongue Twister, Phonology, and Listening

Phonologycal and listening are closely interconnected in second language acquisition, and phonological awareness provides the foundation for both skills. Phonology, the study of a language's sound system, encompasses segmental features such as consonants and vowels, as well as suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation (Celce at all, 2010). Developing learners' phonological competence facilitates accurate speech

production and enhances listening comprehension, as learners become more capable of perceiving and decoding spoken language (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Tongue twisters are a pedagogical tool that can strengthen phonological awareness and production skills. These phrases contain repeated, challenging sound sequences that require rapid alternation of articulatory gestures, thereby enhancing learners' ability to articulate target phonemes and improve segmental accuracy (Sugiharto, 2022). The motor learning perspective suggests that repeated, high speed practice, such as that involved in tongue twisters, promotes automatization of articulatory patterns, reinforcing learners' phonological representations (Lee & Genovese, 2014). By practicing difficult sound combinations, learners not only improve pronunciation but also develop a finer auditory discrimination of contrasting sounds, which is crucial for listening skills.

Empirical research supports the relationship between tongue-twister practice and listening improvement. (Trofimovich and Baker, 2006) demonstrated that learners who engaged in pronunciation focused activities, including tongue twisters, showed enhanced perception of minimal contrasts and better phoneme discrimination in listening tasks. Similarly, (Avriyanti, 2023) reported that teachers perceived tongue twisters as an effective tool for raising students' awareness of sound patterns which facilitated both clearer production and improved auditory perception. These findings suggest that tongue twisters function as both a production and perception exercise, bridging phonology and listening.

However, researchers caution that tongue twisters alone may not automatically generalize to communicative listening. Integration with perceptual tasks such as minimal pair discrimination, focused dictation, or slowed listening exercises is recommended to maximize listening benefits (Kissling, 2013). When combined, tongue twisters provide learners with repeated, engaging practice that simultaneously reinforces phonological patterns and sharpens auditory sensitivity, highlighting their dual role in pronunciation and listening instruction.

In conclusion, tongue twisters serve as a practical and motivating tool in English teaching by linking phonological practice to listening development. They reinforce articulatory accuracy while improving learners' ability to perceive phonemic contrasts, making them an effective bridge between phonology and listening skills in language classrooms. Phonology provides the foundational knowledge necessary for learners to decode spoken English accurately. Effective English teaching integrates phonological instruction with listening practice to enhance learners' comprehension and communication skills. Teachers' attention to both segmental and suprasegmental features, along with structured perceptual activities, can significantly improve learners' listening performance and overall oral proficiency.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' perceptions of using tongue twisters in teaching phonology and listening. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the purpose of the study is to obtain deep, detailed insights into teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom experiences regarding the use of tongue twisters as a pedagogical tool. The descriptive design enables the researcher to present teachers' perspectives as they naturally occur, without manipulation of variables. The participants of this study were English teachers who have experience teaching pronunciation, phonology, or listening at the secondary or tertiary level and who have used or are familiar with the use of tongue twisters in the classroom. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that only teachers who could provide relevant and rich information were included. The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to explore predetermined themes while remaining flexible to follow unexpected ideas raised by participants.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participant of this study was an English teacher who has experience teaching pronunciation, phonology, and/or listening skills at the secondary or tertiary education level. To ensure the relevance and richness of the information, the participant was selected using purposive sampling, a technique recommended by Creswell (2012) for selecting individuals who are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. Only teachers who had used, or were familiar with, the implementation of tongue twisters in the classroom were included. This criterion-based selection ensured that the participant could provide meaningful insights aligned with the research questions.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore predetermined themes while remaining flexible to follow new ideas or unexpected issues raised by participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This format provided both structure and openness, enabling teachers to describe their experiences, challenges, and perceptions in their own words while ensuring that all key topics, such as the effectiveness of tongue twisters, instructional contexts, and perceived benefits or challenges were thoroughly explored.

Data Collection

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the procedures outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analysis began with data condensation in which interview recordings were transcribed and repeatedly read to identify meaningful units. These meaningful segments were then coded and grouped into categories. The next stage involved displaying the data using matrices and organized tables to facilitate the identification of patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the themes that emerged and verifying them against the raw data, ensuring that the findings accurately represented participants' voices.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through member checking, where participants were invited to review the summarized findings to confirm their accuracy. Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics so that readers could determine whether the findings apply to other settings. Dependability was maintained by keeping an audit trail consisting of interview transcripts, field notes, coding procedures, and analytic decisions. Confirmability was ensured by grounding all interpretations in the data and cross-checking emerging themes with field notes and supporting documents.

C. Result and Discussion

Using Tongue twisters in teaching phonology

The findings of this study reveal that the participant perceives tongue twisters as a highly beneficial technique for supporting phonological development. The teacher reported that tongue twisters help students strengthen their articulation and increase their awareness of phonemic distinctions, particularly for sounds that Indonesian learners commonly struggle with, such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/. This perception aligns with Celce et al. (2010), who argue that targeted phonological exercises can improve learners' production of segmental features through repeated articulatory practice. The teacher further explained that tongue twisters create opportunities for learners to isolate and repeatedly produce difficult sounds, which leads to greater accuracy and fluency in pronunciation.

In the interview, the teacher emphasized that tongue twisters are effective because they require rapid alternation of

similar phonemes, compelling students to engage their articulatory muscles more intensively. This aligns with research by Sugiharto (2022), who found that repetitive pronunciation drills using tongue twisters significantly improve learners' phonological precision. Additionally, the teacher stated that students become more conscious of their own mispronunciations when practicing tongue twisters, which fits Trofimovich and Baker's (2006) notion that production-based activities can strengthen phonological representations. Another positive perception expressed by the teacher is the motivating nature of tongue twisters. According to the participant, students enjoy the playful and challenging aspect of tongue twisters, making them more willing to practice pronunciation for longer periods compared to conventional drills. This is consistent with Harmer (2007), who notes that enjoyable activities increase students' willingness to participate in pronunciation practice. Overall, the teacher perceives tongue twisters as an engaging, effective, and practical method for teaching phonology.

Using Tongue twisters in teaching listening

The study also found that the teacher views tongue twisters as an effective tool for enhancing listening skills. The participant explained that because tongue twisters emphasize minimal contrasts and repeated sound patterns, students become more attentive to subtle differences in pronunciation when listening to the teacher's model. This matches findings by Rahmawati and Faridi (2020), who reported that tongue twisters improve learners' listening discrimination by training them to recognize small differences between similar phonemes.

The teacher described that students initially struggle to follow the sounds in tongue twisters, but gradually become more able to distinguish between similar phonemes and identify incorrect sounds when listening to peers. This supports Field (2008), who argues that focused phonological tasks help learners decode acoustic input more efficiently. Moreover, the teacher stated that listening to the rhythm and stress patterns in tongue twisters helps students improve their perception of prosody, which is essential for listening comprehension.

However, the participant also noted that tongue twisters alone may not fully address listening challenges, especially for connected speech or authentic materials. This view aligns with Kissling (2013), who suggests that pronunciation-focused tasks must be complemented by listening activities that include real speech patterns. Nevertheless, the teacher believes that tongue twisters are a strong foundation for helping learners become more sensitive to phonological cues in spoken English.

The challenges and benefits in implementing Tongue twisters

Despite the benefits, the study also uncovered several challenges faced by the teacher. One significant challenge is that some students feel shy or embarrassed when asked to pronounce tongue twisters aloud, particularly those who struggle with English sounds. . This aligns with Derwing and Munro (2015), who argue that anxiety often affects learners' willingness to engage in pronunciation practice. Another challenge expressed by the teacher is the difficulty in selecting appropriate tongue twisters that match learners' proficiency levels. Some tongue twisters are too difficult for beginners, causing frustration instead of motivation. This reflects the concern raised by Kissling (2013) that pronunciation tasks must be adjusted to learners' developmental stages to avoid cognitive overload.

The teacher also pointed out that time constraints sometimes limit the use of tongue twisters in class. Because the activity can be time-consuming if not managed properly, teachers may struggle to balance it with other curriculum demands. Fullan (2007) notes that teachers often resist certain instructional strategies when they appear to conflict with required learning objectives or time allocations. Finally, the teacher observed that some students focus too much on speed rather than accuracy, which reduces the effectiveness of the exercise. This challenge aligns with research by Trofimovich and Baker (2006), which

emphasizes that accuracy must be prioritized before speed during pronunciation training.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers generally perceive tongue twisters as a highly effective pedagogical tool for teaching both phonology and listening. The teacher's perceptions are consistent with a substantial body of literature that highlights the cognitive, auditory, and articulatory benefits of tongue-twister practice. The positive effects perceived by the teacher, such as improved articulation, increased learner motivation, and enhanced listening discrimination reflect the theoretical foundations of phonological learning and motor skill development.

The study's findings also confirm earlier research such as Sugiharto (2022) and Rahmawati & Faridi (2020), demonstrating that tongue twisters strengthen both production and perception skills. In line with Trofimovich and Baker's (2006) assertion that production tasks enhance perceptual abilities, the teacher in this study observed that students developed greater sensitivity to phonemic contrasts after practicing tongue twisters.

However, the study also highlights practical challenges that teachers face, such as student anxiety, inappropriate difficulty levels, and time management. These challenges point to the importance of implementing tongue twisters strategically. Teachers must scaffold activities, select level-appropriate materials, and ensure that learners emphasize accuracy before speed. This is consistent with Celce et al. (2010), who stress the need for systematic and supportive phonology instruction. Overall, the findings suggest that tongue twisters hold significant potential for enhancing phonological and listening skills in EFL classrooms. Yet their effectiveness depends on thoughtful planning, teacher confidence, and learner readiness. The results further highlight the need for teacher training in pronunciation pedagogy, particularly in selecting and adapting tongue twisters that align with students' needs.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the teacher perceives tongue twisters as a valuable and effective pedagogical technique for teaching both phonology and listening. Tongue twisters were viewed as highly beneficial in helping students improve their articulation, develop stronger phonological awareness, and recognize phonemic contrasts that are often challenging for Indonesian EFL learners. These perceptions align with previous research showing that repetitive articulatory practice can enhance learners' pronunciation accuracy and support deeper phonological processing. The teacher also recognized the contribution of tongue twisters to listening development, noting that the activity allows learners to better discriminate similar sounds, identify stress and rhythm patterns, and become more attentive to auditory details in spoken English. This supports the notion that pronunciation and listening are interconnected skills that reinforce each other.

Overall, the study concludes that tongue twisters are a practical, engaging, and low-cost technique with strong potential to improve learners' phonological and listening skills. However, successful implementation requires careful adaptation to learners' proficiency levels, thoughtful instructional planning, and teacher competence in pronunciation pedagogy. The study also highlights the need for further research involving more participants and diverse teaching contexts to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. By considering both the benefits and challenges, educators can maximize the use of tongue twisters as an effective tool for enhancing English phonology and listening instruction in EFL classrooms.

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