INITIAL DATA COLLECTION METHODS IN IMPROVING YEAR FOUR PUPILS' PRONUNCIATION OF LONG VOWELS

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Abstract

I would like to share the initial data collection methods that I have used in my action research in relation to exploring the effect of Emoji word slide and Bingo game in improving my teaching as well as my Year Four pupils' pronunciation of long vowels during English Language lessons. The initial data collection methods used has assisted me, the action researcher, in determining the suitable participants for my action research through purposive sampling and determining a more specific research focus that was, pronunciation of long vowels. I have used several methods in collecting the initial data, which were interviews and document analysis. To further confirm that the participants really faced the issue concern, I have carried out a memory game session on words with the targeted long vowels with the aid of video recording during observation. I analysed the words read by my pupils and counted the number of correct and incorrect pronunciation of words. Then, I chose the participants who mispronounced the targeted long vowels to participate in the research. I also identified the focus of the study, that was, pronunciation of long vowels. In conclusion, initial data collection method is an essential tool for an action researcher in identifying the suitable participants in action research other than leading the researcher to a specific research focus within the researcher's context.

Keywords: English Language, pronunciation, initial data collection method, methodology, long vowels

Abstrak

Saya ingin berkongsi mengenai teknik mengumpul data awal yang saya gunakan dalam penyelidikan tindakan saya. Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesan Emoji word slide dan juga Bingo game dalam menambah baik amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran saya dan juga membantu dalam sebutan vokal panjang dalam kalangan murid Tahun Empat. Sebenarnya, teknik mengumpul data awal telah banyak membantu saya, sebagai penyelidik, dalam menentukan peserta kajian yang sesuai bagi penyelidikan tindakan ini melalui persampelan bertujuan. Saya telah menggunakan beberapa kaedah mengumpul data, iaitu temu bual dan analisis dokumen. Bagi menentukan peserta kajian ini, saya telah menjalani satu sesi 'memory game' perkataan yang mengandungi sebutan vokal panjang. Saya telah membuat analisis pada perkataan yang disebut dan membuat pengiraan dari segi bilangan sebutan yang betul dan salah. Hasil analisis daripada dapatan tersebut, saya memilih peserta kajian yang menghadapi masalah dalam sebutan vokal panjang sebagai peserta kajian ini. Kaedah mengumpul data awal merupakan satu alat yang penting untuk penyelidik menentukan peserta kajian yang sesuai serta fokus kajian khusus dalam penyelidikan tindakan.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa English, sebutan, teknik mengumpul data awal, metodologi, vokal panjang

INTRODUCTION

Context

I am a trainee teacher from the Institute of Teacher Education Batu Lintang Campus (ITE BLC), majoring in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL). Throughout these years in the institute, I have been through three phases of practicum in three different schools in Kuching, Sarawak. Although I was assigned to different schools, I found that pupils from these three schools faced similar problems in pronunciation. Hence, in my third phase of practicum, I have used several data collection methods to collect initial data for my action research titled "Using Emoji word slide and Bingo game to improve pronunciation of long vowel /iː/ among year four pupils". In order to protect the rights of all parties, all the names of the schools, teachers and pupils here used are pseudonyms.

INITIAL DATA COLLECTION

Initial data collection is an essential tool for action research. This is because initial data collection has assisted me, as the action researcher, in determining the suitable research participants for my action research through purposive sampling. In addition, the initial data collection was done in the early stage of an action research. According to McNiff and Whitehead's action research model (2002), the initial data collection falls on the first two stages, namely 'observe' and 'describe' stages (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Adapted from McNiff and Whitehead's action research model (2002)

In relation to this action research, I collected the initial data so as to observe the issues faced by my pupils and I to enable me to identify the research focus other than to describe the phenomenon identified.

In order to identify the research participants, I carried out purposive sampling. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), in purposive sampling, the researcher handpicks the sample on the basis of their judgement on typicality. In other words, I only choose the sample with certain characteristics, based on the issues identified to be the research participants. As for my action research, I only selected the pupils with average proficiency in English who faced pronunciation problems as my research participants (Figure 2).
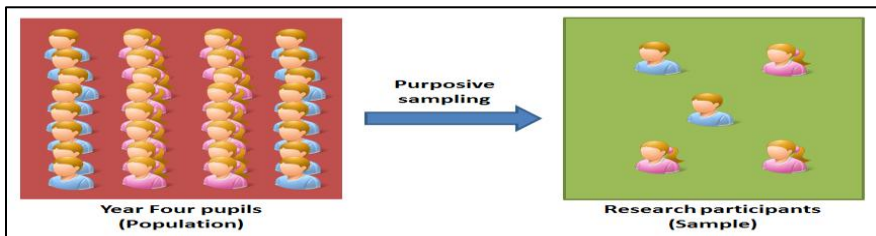
Figure 2. Purposive sampling in identifying my research participants

This was carried out based on my reflection on my previous teaching and learning during practicum. In order to explore further on the issue faced by my pupils, I have used interview, document analysis and observation to collect the initial data.

Interview

Johnson and Christensen (2012) describe interview as a method in data collection in which a researcher asks questions to the research participants. I used interview for that purpose. Moreover, I further used interview in which I interviewed my teacher mentor face-to-face on 25 January 2015 to understand the class that I was going to teach. I also sought her permission to audio-record the interview and then transcribed the interview into words (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Teacher mentor's interview transcript

From the interview, my teacher mentor mentioned that the class was a mixed-ability class, with several weak pupils who were sent to Literacy, Numeracy and Screening (LINUS) programme (Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah Kuala Pilah, 2012). After hearing my concern in identifying the research participants for this study, she recommended five pupils with average proficiency in English by placing remarks on the name list (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Year Four pupils' name list

Document Analysis

Document refers to the existing data that was collected and recorded before a research study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The researcher will find the related document, analyse the document and then use it in his study. In this research, I approached the assistant headmistress for my pupils' academic results so as to confirm my pupils' level of proficiency in English. However, the assistant headmistress could only give me the past year examination results as the school has not conducted any assessment that time. Nevertheless, she provided the Year Three examination results (Figure 5) and the Year Three topical tests results (Figure 6) as alternative.

Figure 5. Year Three examination results

Figure 6. Year Three English tests results

I analysed the document obtained and confirmed that these five pupils had average proficiency in English as they obtained test score ranging from 64 to 86.

Observation

In order to establish rigour in the action research, I did triangulation. Triangulation here refers to the use of data from different angles to give provide objectivity to the findings (Burns, 2010). To triangulate the initial

data collected as well as to confirm the selection of the five pupils as my research participants, I conducted a memory game session on 6 February 2015. In the memory game session, I focused on two long vowel sounds, namely /ɔː/ as correspond to letters 'aw' and /iː/ as correspond to letters 'ea'. Then, I selected and printed a few words with the targeted phonemes on the flashcards (Figure 7).
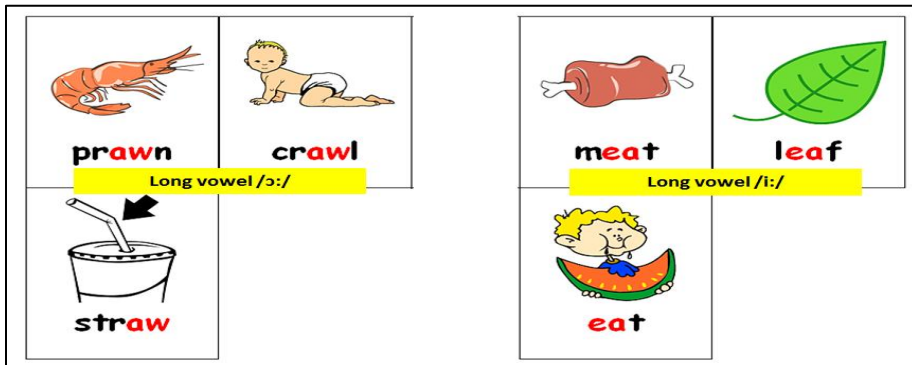

Figure 7. Flashcards used in the memory game session

The memory game session was video recorded so as to ease the analysis of the pupils' pronunciation. Photographs were then snap shot from the video. During the memory game session, I placed all the cards on the table with the words facing downwards. Then, I asked my pupils to pick a card (Figure 8) and read the word to their friend (Figure 9).
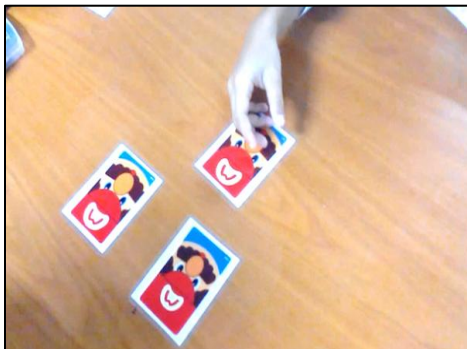

Figure 8. Jacky chose a flashcard

Figure 9. Alva read the word from the flashcard to her friends

After the memory game session, I analysed my pupils' pronunciation and transcribed the words heard using the *International Phonetic Alphabets* (IPA) (1886) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Pronunciation on Words with Long Vowels /ɔ:/and /i:/.

Participants	Words with long vowel /i:/					
	prawn /prɔ:n/	Crawl /krɔ:l/	Straw /strɔ:/	meat /mi:t/	leaf /li:f/	eat /i:t/
Alison	[prɔ:n]	[krɔ:l]	[strɔ:]	[mɪt]	[lɪf]	[ɪt]
Alva	[prɔ:n]	[krɔ:l]	[strɔ:]	[mɪt]	[lɪf]	[ɪt]
Catherine	[prɔ:n]	[krɒl]	[strɔ:]	[mɪt]	[lɪf]	[ɪt]
Ching Meng	[prɒn]	[krɒl]	[strɒ]	[mɪt]	[lɪf]	[ɪt]
Jacky	[prɒn]	[krɔ:l]	[strɒ]	[mɪt]	[lɪf]	[ɪt]

From Table 1, I did frequency count in terms of the correct and incorrect pronunciation of my pupils and later tabulated the findings in table form (Table 2).

Table 2

Pupils' Pronunciation on the Words with the Long Vowel Sounds /ɔ:/ and /i:/.

Words	Correct pronunciation	Incorrect pronunciation
pr<u>aw</u>n	3	2
cr<u>aw</u>l	3	2
str<u>aw</u>	3	2
m<u>ea</u>t	0	5
l<u>ea</u>f	0	5
<u>ea</u>t	0	5

From Table 2, three of the five pupils correctly pronounced the words with /ɔ:/ as correspond to letter 'aw'. On the other hand, the remaining two pupils mispronounced the words. They pronounced the words using the short vowel /e/. Besides, all five of my pupils pronounced incorrectly the words with /i:/ as correspond to letter 'ea'. All of them pronounced the words using the short vowel /ɪ/ as [mɪt], [lɪf] and [ɪt] instead of pronouncing the long vowel /i:/. Hence, from the initial data collected, I decided to conduct an action research to improve my teaching practices as well as to improve my pupils' pronunciation on long vowel /i:/, which was a prominent pronunciation problem faced by five of my pupils.

From the three methods in collecting the initial data, I have formulated my research focus which led to my research objectives. Furthermore, the objectives of my action research were to improve my own practice in teaching pronunciation of long vowel /i:/, to my Year Four classroom, as well as to improve five of my pupils' pronunciation of long vowel /i:/ using the Emoji word slide and Bingo game.

CONCLUSION

Collecting initial data from interview, document analysis and observation in addition to the reflection on my previous teaching and learning practices during practicum, has helped me as an action researcher in identifying the participants for my action research. Not only that, I was able to identify specifically the research focus, that is, the pronunciation of long vowel /i:/ among Year Four pupils using Emoji word slide and Bingo game. Also, by triangulating all the initial data collected, I was able to establish rigour in my action research. I would like to explore other data collecting techniques that I have not used in this research when collecting initial data in my next action research.

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