

Practicing German Pronunciation using ZHA Strategy.

Dewi Kartika Ardiyani^{1*}, Primardiana Hermilia Wijayati², Edy Hidayat³, Rofi'ah⁴

¹⁻⁴Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This research was aimed at assessing the implementation of ZHA approach and students' opinion of the strategy. ZHA was carried out at the end of every *Konversation 2* (speaking) course class at the German Language Education Study Program at State University of Malang (PSPBJ UM). This research utilized the descriptive, qualitative approach using WhatsApp voice notes and open questionnaires as data collecting techniques. The data comprise ZHA voice notes produced by *Konversation 2* course students and teachers and student surveys. The findings of this research indicated that ZHA technique was effectively utilized in the classroom. Students engaged in this technique successfully and took an active role in each ZHA session. Students gave a favorable opinion on the implementation of ZHA approach. Almost all students indicated that the technique helped them pronounce words in German properly and correctly, add new vocabulary, and improve their overall German language.

Keywords: Aussprachetraining, ZHA, Speaking skill, German language, DaF

INTRODUCTION

Speaking problem has long been a barrier for German as foreign language (*Deutsch as Fremdsprache*, abbreviated as DaF) learners and lecturers because it is one of the most challenging language skills (Alsamani, 2013; Edrová, 2015; Nikolić, 2013). In studying German, learners are expected to be able to interact with their interlocutors using communicative and comprehensible German. Furthermore, unlike other language abilities, L2 speaking learners are pressured to produce correct language usage (i.e., accurate grammar and precise pronunciation) in an immediate situation. Therefore, learners commonly confront challenges in speaking.

Our pre-research findings revealed that most German as a foreign language (DaF) learners face three primary challenges when learning to speak, including insufficient grammar, inaccurate pronunciation, and poor vocabulary. Many learners experience pronunciation problems, yet it frequently goes unreported. Pronunciation plays a crucial part in foreign language acquisition (Barkowski et al., 2014; Darcy, 2018; Dieling & Hirschfeld, 2000; Filho & Müller, 2017; Lestari, 2017; Levis, 2015; Mahmood, 2021; Sartor, 2007; Tanir, 2020), yet pronunciation learning tends to be underestimated. There have been various strategies developed to improve students' German grammatical and vocabulary mastery, such as using games (Benholz & Moraitis, 2008; Blachowicz, 2017; Erzsébet, 2016; Holweck & Trust, 2008; Rijal & Fatimah, 2019; *Unterrichtsmaterialien für Ausländer – Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF)*, n.d.), digital applications (Arisanti, 2012; Ongels et al., 2016; Wibisono, 2012), songs (Asali-van der Wal, 2015) and Wortschatzerinnerungskarte (Rofi'ah, 2014). Meanwhile, in the context of German as a foreign language (DaF) in Indonesia, no empirical research has explicitly investigated strategies to improve German L2 pronunciation (*Aussprache*).

Novianti and Kusumajati (Novianti et al., 2019) undertook an online study on techniques to improve English as a foreign

language (EFL) students' pronunciation using podcast medium and found that podcasts may increase students' pronunciation proficiency, notably their speaking articulation, pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. However, English and German have different pronunciation systems and degrees of difficulty.

The Covid-19 epidemic forced all educational institutions, including the German Language Education Study Program at the State University of Malang (PSPBJ UM), to conduct online learning in the 2020-2021 academic year. However, online learning adds to the problem that German language learners and lecturers face, especially in *Konversation 2* class (B1 Exam Preparation). Many PSPBJ UM students have poor German pronunciation and speaking skills. Students with poor speaking and pronunciation abilities tend to be passive in both offline and online lectures. Moreover, learning to speak in an online classroom is significantly more difficult than in offline classes due to the limited number of available online German learning materials and online teaching strategies, and the versatility of offline classes.

For this reason, *Zum Heutigen Aussprachetraining* (literally Today's Pronunciation Exercise, abbreviated as ZHA) strategy was developed to enhance students' German pronunciation. ZHA was carried out in the *Konversation 2*

Corresponding Author: dewi.kartika.fs@um.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0513-445X>

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class at the conclusion of each meeting using voice message/note in the class WhatsApp (WA) group. The researcher hoped that the introduction of ZHA approach might reduce German language education students' pronunciation errors and improve their overall German mastery and proficiency. Using ZHA strategy to address the challenges is crucial since pronunciation and speaking problems can influence students' German mastery.

Few studies have focused on German pronunciation because many considered it a peripheral issue in German language education (Sartor, 2007). Most studies on German pronunciation training have been carried out overseas (Barkowski et al., 2014; Dieling & Hirschfeld, 2000; Filho & Müller, 2017; Rogić, 2017; Sartor, 2007). As a comparison, most studies on German as a foreign language speaking in Indonesian context have concentrated on speaking skills (Erawati, 2019; Ernawati, 2014; Novianti et al., 2019; Rahmawati, 2018; Wulandari Wulandari, 2017), while research on pronunciation primarily focused on pronunciation error analysis (Lestari, 2017; Syawalia, 2013; Wulandari Wulandari, 2017, 2017). No study has explored German mispronunciation as a language learning barrier and strategies to teach pronunciation in Indonesian DaF setting. Therefore, the present research was aimed to gather empirical data about the teaching of German pronunciation, the implementation of ZHA strategies to sharpen students' pronunciation, and students' evaluation of the strategy.

Earlier studies on German learners' pronunciation errors (Lestari, 2017; Syawalia, 2013; Wulandari Wulandari, 2017) have reported that many high school and university DaF learners in Indonesia faced pronunciation problems. Therefore, the findings of this research were expected to serve as a reference and alternative technique for DaF lecturers to improve their German students' pronunciation.

Based on mentioned reasons, it is important to find out the effective way to solve or minimize pronunciation problem in Indonesia, to be precise German pronunciation of students in PSPBJ UM, Indonesia. ZHA tends to be one of the ways to solve the situation. Thus, the research questions are: (1) How is the implementation of ZHA strategy? and 2) How is students' opinion of the ZHA strategy?

METHOD

Research Design

This research was aimed at assessing the implementation of ZHA approach and students' opinion of the strategy. Thus, the research adopted a descriptive, qualitative approach. Creswell(2012) portray qualitative research is typically utilized to set up the significance of the central thought and to explore the problem and create an understanding of small people in social issue.

Population and Study Group

The data were obtained from the students of the German Language Education Study Program (PSPBJ UM) who took *Konversation 2* (speaking) course during the 2020/2021 academic year (N=65; three offerings). The researchers focused on the students' speaking issues, application of ZHA strategy, and students' opinion of ZHA implementation. The participant of this study were selected using purposive sampling method. The participant were selected because they fit the purpose of the research which focused on speaking skills. Besides, they are all on the same level, e.g. level B1.

Data Collection Tools

This research utilized two data collection instruments, eg. WhatsApp voice notes and an open questionnaires. The data comprise ZHA voice notes produced by *Konversation 2* course students and lecturers and student surveys. The first tool is WhatsApp voice notes. The lecturer sends a ZHA sentence via voice note in the class WhatsApp-group (each meeting). Then each student imitates and one by one sends it to the group. The lecturer then confirmed and or corrected the student's pronunciation. All voice notes data were collected into data 1. The next data collection tool is an open questionnaire. This questionnaire aimed to collect student perceptions of the use of the ZHA strategy. In this questionnaire, students completed sentences according to their respective opinions. It consists of four incomplete sentences as follows:

1. In my opinion, the "zum heutigen Aussprachetraining" program in the Conversation course...
2. Through the "zum heutigen Aussprachetraining" program, I find it helpful/unhelpful in pronouncing German vocabulary, because... (please explain why)
3. The advantages of "zum heutigen Aussprachetraining"...
4. Disadvantages of "zum heutigen Aussprachetraining"...

Data Collection

The data were obtained in two phases. The first data collection stage was undertaken from the beginning to the end of the even semester of the 2020-2021 academic year and was focused on investigating the application of ZHA strategy in "*Konversation 2*"(Conversation 2)course. The data were obtained from the lecturer's and students' WhatsApp voice notes while practicing speaking using ZHA strategy. The second data collection was carried out at the conclusion of the even semester and was meant to evaluate students' impression of ZHA strategy using an open questionnaire instrument.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves continual reflection on the data, analytical question on the data, and recording brief notes during the

investigation. The data analysis in the current study was carried out before entering the field, while collecting the data in the field, and after completing the field study (Creswell, 2012; Sugiyono, 2012). The data were prepared and collected since the beginning of the study. During the study, authors were looking at the collected data. The data then were organized and categorized. Authors described the data and then interpreted it. Last, the data were used to answer the aim of the study.

FINDINGS

Implementation of ZHA strategy to improve DaF students' pronunciation

Zum Heutigen Aussprachetraining (ZHA) strategy was created by the authors and was adopted by the lecturer teaching Konversation 2 (speaking) course at PSPBJ UM in the 2020/2021 academic year. This technique was developed to address DaF learners' speaking problems and enhance the overall PSPBJ UM students' speaking quality.

ZHA strategy was carried out at the end of every meeting in Konversation 2 (speaking) course, lasting roughly 15-20 minutes using WhatsApp social media voice notes. Konversation 2 course students and lecturer joined a WhatsApp group for group communication. At the end of each class, students performed ZHA via WhatsApp group. First, the lecturer posted a sentence written in German (see figure 1 and 2) to the class WhatsApp group and supplied a voice note containing the sentence pronunciation. The bold written sentence in figure 1 is an example of an utterance used in ZHA strategy:

After reading the sentence, each student recited the sentence, audio recorded it, and sent it to the WhatsApp group. After all students repeated the utterance, the lecturer commented on students' pronunciation.

Most students can pronounce the sentence correctly based on the standard German pronunciation (*Hochdeutsch*). However, the researchers also found that few students mispronounced the words. For example, some students pronounced *r* in *träume* [ˈtrɔɪmə] and *traum* [trɔʊm] using trill [r] (as in Indonesian) or [ɹ] (as in English), although the correct pronunciation in German is [ʀ]. Similarly, some students frequently mispronounced word *nicht* /nixt/ as /nts/ or /nit/.

The lecturer addressed students' voice note submission using word, phrase, sentence, or emoticon to appreciate

Träume nicht dein Leben, lebe deinen Traum!

/ˈtrɔɪmə nɪxt daɪn leːbən, leːbə daɪnən trɔʊm/

“Don't dream your life, make your dreams come true!”

Fig. 1. The example sentence of ZHA for the theme *Passende Stelle or Arbeit*

students' work and affirm that they have done it correctly. The lecturer also praised students who made pronunciation errors and asked them to reread and rerecord the sentence while listening to the lecturer's pronunciation examples. The lecturer gave a brief appreciation and comment to each voice note submission and later gave more thorough corrections at the end of the session after all students sent their voice notes. The lecturer provided feedback on student's errors by commenting on students' accurate pronunciation and what students may do to enhance their pronunciation. Next, the lecturer showed instances of mispronunciation that students made and how to rectify them.

Another aspect to highlight in the execution of ZHA strategy is the use of sentence. The lecturer utilized sentences in line with the learner's aptitude and the learning topic discussed. For example, the sentence in figure 1 utilized for ZHA activity is a German aphorism related to *Passende Stelle or Arbeit* (dream job) topic. The lecturer used simple sentences or aphorisms related to the learning topic. Another sentence example can be seen at figure 2. She used the following line while addressing *Probleme haben und Lösung finden* (problems and solutions) topic:

The lecturer wrote the sentence in figure 2 in response to one of the students' complaint about his/her laundry. Students learned a new German vocabulary *Wäsche* (dirty laundry). The phrase *Wäsche waschen* is an excellent exercise to identify between the thick *s* [sch] and [ʃ].

Students' perception of the implementation of ZHA strategy

In general, students expressed a favorable impression of the implementation of ZHA plan. Almost all students believed that the pronunciation exercise is beneficial to develop their perfect German pronunciation. The students indicated that the use of ZHA method and the lecturer's pronunciation example assisted them in learning the correct pronunciation. The lecturer's pronunciation examples helped the students learning the pronunciation. The students could then practice the pronunciation independently using the examples provided, record their pronunciation using WhatsApp voice notes, and send it to the WhatsApp chat group.

Students reported that the lecturer's feedback helps them self-check the accuracy of their pronunciation. Students can learn from their mispronunciation errors and understand

Wäsche waschen ist ein Muss, nicht beklagen ist ein Plus.

/ˈvɛʃə vafən st aɪn mʊs, nɪxt bəˈklaːɡən st aɪn pluːs/

“Washing clothes is a must, not complaining is a plus”

Fig. 2: The example sentence of ZHA for the theme *Probleme haben und Lösung finden*

how to correct them. The students also gained phonological knowledge of how to pronounce particular words correctly, such as pronouncing trill /r/ phoneme, *haben* and *hatten* suffixes, and so on. The lecturer occasionally supplied extra information about German culture (*Landeskunde*). In addition, students also gained new vocabulary.

DISCUSSION

Speaking competence is one of the vital SLA competencies. An L2 learner is deemed to master the target/second language speaking when s/he can talk effectively using the language in question. Alsamani (Alsamani, 2013) noted that speaking has a crucial role in language acquisition, and it is a learner's key to L2 learning success. Wolf (Wolf, 2010) stated that on average, language users utilize 90 percent of spoken language and 10 percent of written language. Therefore, it is not surprising that many people consider speaking skills as the most fundamental and even the goal of language learning (Alsamani, 2013b; Edrová, 2015; Fischer, 2005; Kadamovna, 2021; Nikolić, 2013).

Acquiring L2 speaking has been proven to be equally challenging as mastering other language skills (writing, reading, and listening). Some scholars even viewed L2 speaking as the most challenging language competence since L2 learners are required to go through a complicated process to be able to talk effectively and intelligibly (McLaren et al., 2006; Wijayati et al., 2018). Some researchers suggested that speaking ability is the hardest language skill (Alsamani, 2013b; Edrová, 2015; Kadamovna, 2021; Nikolić, 2013) because learners need to master several components, such as lexical (vocabulary), grammar, phonology, semantics, and other linguistics aspects (Edrová, 2015) to speak proficiently. In addition, one's speaking ability is constructed by several cognitive and psychological components. Thus, students need to have excellent linguistics knowledge and suitable psychological (mental) states (Wijayati et al., 2018) to attain speaking success.

Speaking is one of the language abilities that German as a foreign language (DaF) students must master. Learners are expected to be able to converse using appropriate and comprehensible German with their interlocutor. PSPBJ UM students must be able to create speech utterances using accurate grammar and pronunciation in a considerably shorter preparation time compared to other productive abilities, resulting students making numerous speaking errors. Richards (Fitriani et al., 2015) recognized three common challenges which L2 learners face, including lack of vocabulary required to talk, grammatical errors, and mispronunciation. Similar to Richards (Fitriani et al., 2015), our pre-study findings indicated that most PSPBJ UM students have grammatical, pronunciation, and vocabulary issues.

L2 pronunciation is an essential component that foreign language learners must consider since one's pronunciation

may determine the success of communication. Pronunciation is directly connected to listening and grammar (Fitriani et al., 2015). Mispronunciation errors can shift an utterance meaning, and complicate and impede the conversation (Barkowski et al., 2014; Dieling & Hirschfeld, 2000; Lestari, 2017). Pronunciation problems have more substantial consequences on the interlocutor's comprehension and overall communication process than grammatical and lexical errors (Dahmen & Hirschfeld, n.d.; Dieling & Hirschfeld, 2000). Furthermore, mispronunciation and intonation that substantially vary from the target language may interfere in interlocutor's comprehension and the communication process. Therefore, some researchers considered pronunciation as a major problem that impede foreign language learners' learning to speak (Fitriani et al., 2015; Shen & Chiu, 2019).

The execution of ZHA plan in the even semester of 2020/2021 was successful. The lecturer and students could apply ZHA method successfully, and they participated actively during ZHA session. The use of ZHA approach motivated students to be more eager and determined to improve their pronunciation. The lecturer appreciated students' work and affirmed that they have done it correctly. She believed that such tiny recognition would make students feel valued and more motivated to work well with their pronunciation. Thus, students become well aware of their shortcomings and how to pronounce words correctly.

ZHA approach was implemented by examining linguistic variables such as German phonetics, intonation, and sound (*laute*) which students require to speak German (Barkowski et al., 2014) as well as speaking subjects and students' demands. In addition, the lecturer also evaluated aspects that impact German pronunciation, including the perception of hearing in German vs. in students' first language, the difference of phoneme articulation between the first language and German, cultural difference, German writing system, and speaker's personality (Barkowski et al., 2014).

The ZHA strategy employed via WhatsApp voice notes eases the students to access and adopt the strategy for their learning. Most university students were familiar with WhatsApp features, so employing the voice note function in WhatsApp could be considered a realistic and easy model. The students can listen to the lecturer's examples and record their voices immediately into the designated WhatsApp class group.

The lecturer's feedback is valuable to help students self-check the accuracy of their pronunciation, reflect on their learning, learn from their mispronunciation errors and understand how to correct them. From the lecturers feedback, students gained phonological knowledge of how to pronounce particular words correctly. In addition, the lecturer occasionally supplied extra information about German culture (*Landeskunde*) which is relevant to the topic learned and the phrase meaning making the application of ZHA strategy more pivotal in DaF.

In addition to phonological knowledge, students also gained new vocabulary. The lecturer utilized the ZHA approach on basic sentences to introduce new vocabularies, so students may boost their vocabulary. Furthermore, the continual implementation of ZHA technique helps students refine their German pronunciation. Students were expected to improve their German pronunciation by studying, practicing, and listening to the lecturer's examples and criticism.

At last, Asali (Asali-van der Wal, 2015) stated that the use of various media, especially in large groups of learners, promotes motivation, encourages participation in groups, contributes to a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and helps drill and improve vocabulary and phonetic structures including pronunciation. However, excellent pronunciation does not emerge by itself but stems from rigorous training and effective learning strategy (Barkowski et al., 2014). Repetition practice using ZHA strategy is helpful to enhance students' pronunciation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To sum up, the student participants agreed that ZHA approach is advantageous since it enhanced the students' German pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking abilities. In addition, the strategy may increase students' self-confidence and can be utilized as a medium of self-reflection and assessment on students' pronunciation. The technique was designed to help students grasp the concept and enhance their language production. Moreover, the students also regarded the lecturer's feedback in ZHA strategy as beneficial. On the other hand, the students also criticized ZHA technique due to its simplicity. The students, for example, mentioned that the time and sentences utilized in ZHA session were too short, and the students could not observe the lecturer's place of articulation and movement of articulation organs since the lecturer pronounced the sentences using voice notes rather than video.

Pronunciation is an essential part of language which DaF learners need to master since one's pronunciation might impact his/her success of communication. It is also one of the primary hurdles in learning German as a foreign language (DaF). ZHA is an innovative technique to enhance students' German pronunciation. The current research has demonstrated that ZHA strategy was appropriate for Konversation 2 course students, as indicated in their opinions of the implementation of the strategy.

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