

USING VIDEO RECORDING PROJECT TO IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

Hoang Thi Thu Ha¹

Received: 28 March 2021/ Accepted: 25 March 2022/ Published: April 2022

Abstract: *This article is about an action research which has been conducted in the course English 3 for 40 second-year students of Early Childhood Education Faculty, Hong Duc University. The research implemented the activity of self-recording as a homework after teacher instructed pronunciation rules and assessment criteria. The components of pronunciation which were focused are sounds, stress and intonation. There are two circles in this action research. After the first circle, there were supplemental actions to improve the intonation practice. The findings from tests, observation, and students' document express that the self-recording has had a positive impact on students' pronunciation when they pronounce English.*

Keywords: *Video recording, pronunciation, non-English major.*

1. Introduction

Pronunciation has long been considered as a very important part in the language learning process by many well-known scholars in the world. One among these scholars, Tench [6] already states that pronunciation is not an optional extra for the language learner any more than grammar, vocabulary or any other aspect of language is. In order to get the reasonable pronunciation of a language, firstly the speakers must have the acceptable understanding of the very basic foundation: the sound system, the syllable system and the word systems. After that, it is suitable to mention the idea about what factors can affect the acquisition of these systems in a certain second language. Avery and Ehrlich [1], on the other hand, claim that there are many factors, and among these, the teacher plays a very decisive role. They could positively affect students by showing them the clear purposes and realistic goals.

The students at Hong Duc University are required to have general knowledge in four main skills of English: reading, speaking, listening and writing. Although they do not have the main course book of pronunciation, this sub-skill does clearly affect students' speaking and listening results. To achieve the required level, the students obviously have to spend much time self-studying outside classroom. Besides, most of them were full of energy with pronunciation practice, and pleased to use the technology in class.

¹ Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hong Duc University; Email: hoangthithuha@hdu.edu.vn

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Pronunciation

2.1.1. Pronunciation concepts

Tench [6] defines pronunciation as a notion which is more than a matter of consonants, vowels and diphthongs. He links pronunciation to the sound of people when they are speaking, to the rise and fall of the pitch of the voice, to the pausing and grouping together of words and phrases, and to the highlighting of some syllables and the virtual suppression of others. Pronunciation, then, is itself a complex of sounds (consonants, vowels and diphthongs), syllables (word accent and rhythm) and intonation.

From a different view point, according to Hewings [3], there are certain components of speech which together combine to form the pronunciation of a language. These components range from the individual sounds that make up speech, to the way in which pitch - the rise and fall of the voice - is used to convey meaning.

2.1.2. Aspects of pronunciation

The following diagram of Kelly [5] shows a breakdown of the aspects of pronunciation:

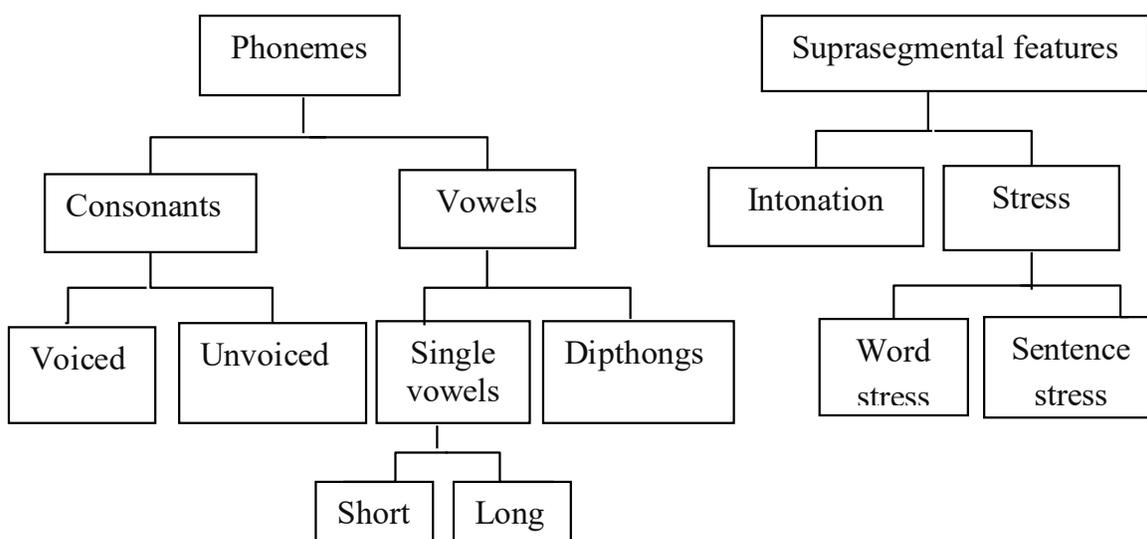


Figure 1. Feature of pronunciation (Kelly, 2000)

It is clear that Kelly sees pronunciation as the combination of two main parts: phonemes and suprasegmental features. The former component includes consonants and vowels, whereas the later one contains intonation and stress.

2.2. Teaching pronunciation

2.2.1. Teaching pronunciation

Different scholars suggest different approaches to teaching pronunciation. In the ways of teaching English pronunciation, there are some clear approaches. Tench [6] for

example, suggests that the basic strategy in pronunciation teaching is imitation. The learners need to be able to imitate the teacher's pronunciation, imitating not only the features of consonants, vowels and diphthongs, but also rhythm and intonation.

Kenworthy [2] points out several factors which may affect pronunciation accuracy. They are native language, age factor, amount of exposure, phonetic ability, attitude and identity, motivation and concern for good pronunciation. He also tries to find out which factors can themselves be affected by teaching and training. Among them, motivation and concern for good pronunciation can be greatly affected.

2.2.2. Teaching pronunciation to Vietnamese learners

Hewings [3] acknowledges that in some classes, pronunciation is given a lower priority than other components of language such as grammar and vocabulary, and is sometimes relegated to an 'end-of-the-day' activity or a five-minute filler to give students some relief from 'real' work of language learning. This situation is also very common in many English lessons in Vietnam.

For most students, however, an understandable pronunciation will be an important part of their communication skills, and this justifies giving pronunciation a more central role in teaching by integrating it with other areas of language work. Perhaps, the most obvious area for useful integration is work that connects vocabulary and pronunciation. There are good arguments for teaching the pronunciation of words (both the sounds and their stress) as they are introduced. If students have confidence that they can pronounce a word correctly, they are more likely to use it as they speak, and using words successfully aids memorization [6].

2.2.3. Self-evaluation and monitoring

According to Kenworthy [2], teacher should combine the monitoring and self-evaluation both inside and outside classroom. Moreover, oral homework should be included.

Language learning is an extended process, and whenever we are involved in a learning task over a long period of time it is very easy to lose track of our progress. Therefore, keeping a record of progress or the students' tape will help.

Video recording as homework is mentioned as following:

Assignments are prepared, rehearsed, and then recorded on video or audio tape... learners evaluate their own performance using a score system specified by the teacher. There is then an opportunity for feedback and evaluation by the teacher. This may be given during 'pronunciation clinics' (ten or fifteen minute-slots when students can discuss their assignments) or during a lesson in which class members have the opportunity to play or show their completed assignments and receive comments from their teacher and colleagues.

In general, the theories of teaching English pronunciation focus on encouraging students to imitate the certain model and self-evaluating their practicing results gradually. Based on these theories, I constructed my research with the main principle of imitating and self-evaluating to see the changes. As the previous part, building the general understanding

about sound, word and stress system would be the first step, then teacher should let student to imitate the model and evaluate their practice's product.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research question

The study was carried out with the purpose of finding out the answers to the following research questions:

How do teachers implement video recording to improve current pronunciation practice of students?

How effective are these activities in improving the students' pronunciation and listening skill?

3.2. Participants

The study was carried out at Hong Duc University in Thanh Hoa Province. Hong Duc University is a public institution which includes many different faculties. The participants of the study are in one class of about 40 non-English major students in the department of Preschool Education, who had to study *English 3* as a compulsory subject in the academic year of 2019 - 2020 at Hong Duc University. The study was conducted for the purpose of implementing the intervention to improve the pronunciation by asking them to video-record themselves when pronouncing the English words or sentences at home as the assignment.

3.3. Data collection

3.3.1. Test recording

All the scores of tests of students were recorded. In every pronunciation test, students were required to recognize the separate sounds, words and sentences. The result of the test was noted by the teacher into the blog. The score of listening tests and pronunciation tests were kept in the teacher blog as well.

3.3.2. Classroom observation

The teacher observed, took note about the changes of students' pronunciation and kept the notes in the teaching log.

3.3.3. Students' document

The researcher collected the assessment sheets of the students after every meeting to analyze them. The improvement via the rate in the assessment sheet and the comments were selected to analyze. The documents also included the videos of students uploaded in the class page.

The data which were collected from classroom observation and students' documents were analyzed by qualitative method and quantitative method, the results of formal tests were analyzed by quantitative method.

4. Finding and discussion

4.1. Finding from the pre-tests and the first recording

From the result, the researcher realized most of students had problems with the initial voiceless /t/, the middle voiceless consonant and middle /s/ or the ending sounds. Moreover, even simple words were often pronounced with wrong stress syllable.

The first time self-recording videos of students were also used to analyze the main problems of pronunciation and then to compare with other videos to see the changes in their English pronunciation practice after the process of doing research.

In general, students in this study were at a quite low level of starting point in listening skill, most students did not have ability to recognize English words. Moreover, they lack of the basic knowledge of pronunciation like sounds or words stress. The intervention was going to be carried out to improve the situation.

4.2. The first intervention

The first circle of intervention took place during the first 5 weeks of the course. Based on the class observation and the pre-test, the researcher introduced the pronunciation exercises and asked students to practice at home individually and record it. The researcher also provided time for students to peer review and gave feedback after each recording session. Finally, the researcher distributed the marking scheme for students to help them correct themselves according to the marking criteria.

In general, after this intervention, there was a slight increase in the medium score of listening test, however, the higher one tended to decrease. The results of pronunciation test were improved significantly, but the production of single components of pronunciation had different changes, both positively, and negatively. When the separate sounds and stress were produced more correctly than the test 1, the correctness of intonation produced almost decreased. This would require more intervention after the first process of 5 weeks.

4.3. The next circle of intervention

The next circle of intervention took place from week 6 to week 11 in the English 3 course. Based on the class observation, the pre-test and the second test, the researcher kept introducing the intonation exercises and asked students to practice at home individually and record it. The main goal of this circle is to help students correct the intonation themselves and confirm the general trend of listening score in relation with the improvement of pronunciation itself.

After the second intervention, there was the similar trend of increase in medium score in listening test. The score of pronunciation test also significantly went up, but the main goal of improving intonation patterns was not achieved, except for a clear improvement in the rising tune of Yes/No question. This would require more intervention and method to help students correct themselves.

4.4. Results of students in the pretest, 2nd test and 3rd test in comparison

Table 1. Results of mini-pronunciation tests

	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3
Number of students	40	40	40
MEAN	1.54	4.24	6.6
MEDIAN	2	4	6.5
MODE	2	6	7

It is clear that results of pronunciation test improved significantly after every stage. The average correct words (MEAN) in 3rd test was 6.6, which is approximately three times higher than that in the 1st test. The center score (MEDIAN) and the score which appeared with the highest density (MODE) also tripled after the intervention.

4.5. Further findings from teacher's observation and students' documents

The checklist of teacher in observation sheet can be sorted in the following table to compare the students' behavior before and after the intervention to see the degree of participation and pronunciation awareness. The behaviors are compared in the stage of before and after each intervention. The observations were taken in class, when the teacher called students to practice, or when teacher went around to see students working in pair or group.

Table 2. Behaviors of students in two intervention cycles

Student's behaviors	Before intervention	After the 1 st intervention	After the 2 nd intervention
Slowly standing up	90%	77.5%	65%
Not paying attention to instruction in pronunciation	27.5%	25%	25%
Slowly pronouncing	92.5%	47.5%	32.5%
Not raising hand when T calls volunteer	100%	92.5%	57.5%
Being careful in producing first consonant	2.5%	27.5%	40%
Being careful in producing final consonant	0%	22.5%	42.5%
Being careful in producing middle /s/	7.5%	22.5%	32.5%
Paying attention to word stress	10%	40%	37.5%
Paying attention to sentence stress	0%	15%	17.5%
Paying attention to intonation pattern	7.5%	47.5%	47.5%

There were the significant changes in the students' behaviors. The negative behaviors like slowly standing up or pronouncing slowly were decreased (from 90% to 65% and 92.5% to 32.5% respectively). Moreover, the positive behaviors like paying attention to sound /s/ or word stress increased (from 7.5% to 32.5% and 10% to 37.5% respectively).

Teacher's observation during class hour and informal interview with students in break time was considered as a supportive data to find out the effect of using video

recording on student's pronunciation and the way they produce sounds, words and sentences. Besides, it shows how students evaluated the new method of self-recording and how helpful they thought it was. The findings are presented as follows.

Firstly, students were embarrassed because they had never recorded themselves and let others see before. Then they were encouraged by the promise of teacher that the Facebook group would be private and nobody else except for their classmates and teacher could see those videos. After that, students were very enthusiastic to join in and almost all the students in class participated in the recording group. At the beginning, a lot of sounds and words were pronounced wrongly when students had to spend much time before reading each word; in the end, they could produce some sounds very similar to those of English native speakers.

Secondly, during the class hour, students were really motivated. By giving and receiving feedback, they paid more attention to the components of pronunciation like sound, intonation and stress. The comments of teacher on sample video of a random student every period also helps the students repair the common mistakes. On the other hand, the informal interview with students reveals that they thought the video recording activity was very new and special. Even though, this activity helps them very effectively in motivate self-speaking.

For the intonation field, students often forgot to apply the knowledge about types of intonation when practicing the conversations. Even after the instruction, students seemed to be shy to use the correct intonation, especially the rising ones. The situation was improved when students had to practice and record in pairs. In this way, the confidence of learners was increased since they could have one more partner also appear and they could do as they were in real life.

Students also expressed the significant improvement on evaluation sheets after two periods of intervention.

Table 3. Student's documents of self-evaluation sheets

Criteria	Before intervention	After the 1st intervention	After the 2nd intervention
Pronouncing the separate sounds correctly	57.5%	65%	65%
Pronouncing the separate words correctly	15%	17.5%	25%
Pronouncing the separate sentences correctly	0 %	7.5%	5%
Having correct word stress	35%	77.5%	90%
Having correct sentence stress	27.5%	22.5%	52.5%
Having correct intonation	0%	15%	32.5%

It is clear that after 2 interventions, the percentage of correctness increased significantly, especially in pronouncing separate words (from 15% at the beginning to 25% in the end) and word stress (from 35% to 90%). The improvement was that the percent of correct sentence stress and intonation rose (from 27.5% to 52.5% and from 0% to 32.5% respectively).

5. Conclusion and implications to language teaching and learning

In this paper, an action research has been conducted in the course English 3 for 40 second-year students of Early Childhood Education Faculty, Hong Duc university. The components of pronunciation were focused are sounds, stress and intonation. Certain exercises including practicing sounds, words, short conversations and listing the words were introduced. The instruments of conducting the research are record of pretest, 2nd tests and 3rd test, class observation and students document with informal interviews. The researcher first investigated the situation of pronunciation and listening level of students through pretest, and some special features of pronunciation or common mistakes were also discovered when the first video of every learner was analyzed, mostly the mistake when producing the first consonant /t/, and middle /s/ or the final sound. There are 2 circles in the study. After the first 5 weeks, there was a supplemental actions of asking students to record in pair to improve the intonation practice. The findings from tests, observation, interviews and students' document have shown that the self-recording improves pronunciation and the confidence for students when pronouncing greatly.

This study can be used as a reference source for English teacher, students and those interested in using new technology for self-study. The findings of the study indicated that technology could play as a positive factor to motivate the English learning environment of students. Even though there is a new action, students will very quickly adapt with it. Video self-recording activity is very practical homework which can be applied to improve the confidence and pronunciation proficiency. However, it must go well with the careful instruction and research on the common mistakes. Teacher could let students evaluate their videos so that they could check their pronunciation again in class.

During the first time of recording, students, especially non-English major ones often feel embarrassed and do not dare to record. What the teacher should do is to encourage them, let a closed and secured page so that nobody outside the class could see these videos. In addition, there must be the bonus marks for those who have good videos.

References

- [1] P. Avery, S. Ethrich (1992), *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, 11th edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [2] J. Kenworthy (1987), *Teaching English Pronunciation*, 7th edition. London, New York: Longman.
- [3] M. Hewings, S. Goldstein (1998), *Pronunciation plus: practice through interaction: North American English*. Cambridge, U. K. & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] M. Hewings (2004), *Pronunciation practice activities: A resource book for teaching English pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [5] G. Kelly (2000), *How to teach pronunciation*. London: Longman.
- [6] P. Tench (1981), *Pronunciation skills*, 3rd edition. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.