

# An Investigation on Hindrance Factors to the Effectiveness of Song Deployment in Hufi Pronunciation Class

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## ABSTRACT

Pronunciation, undeniably, an integral part of the language teaching and learning process. Bad pronunciation may cause misunderstanding or in the worst case a communication breakdown. On the other hand, correct pronunciation helps to keep the conversation go on smoothly. Additionally, it can leave a good impression on the listeners. Being aware of its vital role in English learners' speaking competence, researchers and teachers have paid considerable attention to it. However, it still remains a big challenge in classrooms. The author believes that English songs would help address this problem greatly. Therefore, in this paper, she would like to examine problems associated with the deployment of English songs in pronunciation classes with an aim to find ways to make most of it. The findings have pointed out a short of time, an intensive syllabus, multi – level classes, big class size, a lack of formal training for teacher, a mismatch between teachers and students' perception of interesting songs, poorly – designed tasks have reduced the benefits of the use of music in her research contexts. Therefore, a number of suggestions have been made to deal with them including: a creation of a song collection for pronunciation learning and teaching with the participation of students, an extended course for pronunciation and an introduction of a training course for teachers. Because of limited time and scope of this study, her research will based on the review and analysis of related literature, her students' characteristics and her own working setting – Hochiminh University of Food Industry and an informal discussion with her teaching mates. Nontheless, the findings will certainly benefits learners, educators and language institutions in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** English songs; pronunciation; teaching technique; English communication; English teaching and learning contexts

## 1 Introduction

Since the “open – door” policy was introduced, Vietnam has created favorable conditions to attract foreign investment. Consequently, FDI sector has become a major player in Vietnamese economy with a great number of companies which attract a huge local labor force. To meet the working demand in these companies, foreign language learning and teaching has been emphasized more than ever, especially English. Being a language of international communication, it is used in almost all foreign companies, even in Vietnamese ones. Unsurprisingly, university graduates have a pressing need to arm themselves with this vital soft skill to have a better job opportunity. For English – majored ones, a competence in this language even decides whether they are employed. Being aware of the goal and needs of these students, English teaching in Hochiminh University of Food Industry has focused on promoting their communication skills. Of them, speaking is paid most attention for its role in real life and for its equation with language competence.

Obviously, one can not achieve good oral communicative skill without correct pronunciation. Poor pronunciation will not only make the speakers appears unprofessional. In worse cases, it may lead to misunderstanding or communication breakdown. To cope with this problem, a pronunciation course has



been included in the training program in Hufi. As a teacher in this course, the author and her colleagues have applied different methods and approaches to teach her students. Among them is the deployment of English songs, which is strongly believed to boost the learners' pronunciation. However, the outcome is still unsatisfying. As a result, the researcher of this paper has decided to examine hindrances to the success of song application in Hufi pronunciation class.

Two guiding questions that keeps the study goes:

1. What major problems hinder the effectiveness of using songs in Hufi pronunciation class?
2. What can be done to make most of songs in pronunciation class in Hufi?

## **2 Background to the Study**

As the demanding for an English communicative competence is becoming greater than ever. Hufi has deployed ever single possible mean to foster their English majored students' language skills in order to meet the requirement of the society. As the central part of oral communication skill, pronunciation has got favorable attention from all related parties. However, it has remained a challenge task due to the fact that the learners come from different localities with various learning background. Many of them have a basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but they cannot or are reluctant to speak English due in great part to pronouncing capability. While the introduction of a pronunciation course with the deployment of the textbook "English pronunciation in use" is clearly practical and helpful for them, the constraint of time with so many pronouncing problems to work on has demotivated many them. To inspire their learning spirit and to enhance their production of English sounds, intonation, rhythm and stress, songs have been encouraged to be used in the class as a teaching aid. Although having got positive feedback from the students, the teaching team has acknowledged that the results are still far from the expectations. This fact has prompted the author of this paper to carry out research into factors that hinder the maximum benefits of songs in improving Hufi English majors' mastery of pronunciation.

## **3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Elements of Pronunciation**

#### **3.1.1 Segmental Aspects**

These linguistic elements deals with sounds which are the smallest unit from which words are formed. According to Gimson (1962), P. Roach (1983), English sounds consist of vowels and consonants, which have different functions in a syllable. It is the differences in the range of sounds in English which pose a challenge for learners when they have to learn how to make certain new ones correctly. Mispronounced sounds can even alter the meaning of a word and the speaker's message accordingly. Xuan (2019) also believed that the segmental features play a significant role in the speakers' appropriate pronunciation of English. Unsurprisingly, he regards them as the core elements in English pronunciation learning and teaching.

#### **3.1.2 Supra - Segmental Aspects**

While the segmental features are often considered the central part of English pronunciation, the supra – segmental ones which consists of intonation, stress and rhythm cannot be ignored. Recognizing that problems with them may cause some of the worst misunderstandings among learners and native speakers, Nunan (1991) believed that the teaching of mere sounds is not sufficient but the inclusion of intonation, stress should be included to make the instructional program for pronunciation stronger. He pointed out the fact that for most of its history, the teaching of pronunciation has been biased toward segmental aspects of the sound system. The importance of supra – segmental ones has been recognized.

Although confirming that pronunciation includes the sounds of the language, the stress, rhythm and intonation. and the first component is the most obvious and clearly defined of among them, Ur (1996) acknowledges that the others should not be neglected because a learner may enunciate the sounds perfectly but poor stress, rhythm and intonation may make a difference to meaning.

Pennington and Richards (1986; cited in Nunan (1999)) also argue in favor of a suprasegmental approach on the grounds that “teaching isolated forms of sounds and words fails to address the fact that, in communication, many aspects of pronunciation are determined by the positioning of elements within long stretches of speech”.

### **3.2 The Effectiveness of Songs in Improving English Pronunciation**

#### **3.2.1 Songs Improve Different Segments of Pronunciation**

English with its own pronouncing features has caused great difficulties and anxiety for learners. While the traditional teaching materials cannot provide satisfactory input, songs have been proved to be an effective mean because they provide authentic, memorable and easily accessible examples of spoken English in a relaxing way. Their rhymes provide listeners with repetition of sounds and other supra – segmental features. Students are young and are usually music lovers. They often listen to their favorite songs again and again, which indirectly exposes them to elements of pronunciation they need to learn. Many of them even enjoy singing along with their favorite singers. This habit helps them practice pronouncing English in a comfortable manner.

#### **3.2.2 Songs Promote Students’ Learning Motivation: Relaxed, a Fun Way of Learning**

Motivation is, undeniably, an indispensable part of language learning success. While a lot of studies have been devoted to find out ways to foster it, many researchers have been convinced of motivational value of songs can bring about for learners. It is their rhythmic nature that helps to stimulate and engage the students’ attention and interest and makes their language acquisition more comprehensible and memorable. With this positive learning experience, their inspiration for learning is boosted accordingly.

Nunan (1991; 95) also confirm that “motivational element in learning songs in the foreign language is obvious. This tug is even self – evident in English as it is the language of popular music. English songs are widely used in language teaching because they have great attraction to the students. The relaxed atmosphere songs create can expose students to difficult pronunciation areas beyond their recognition. Besides, the use of songs makes learning enjoyable and fits with students’ psychological features and emotional requirements. Students are often willing to learn to sing an English song even if they do not fully understand or partially understand the meaning of the words”.

To sum up, learning English pronunciation through songs creates learners a chance to feel relaxed from the pressure of the study. It is also a great way to combine their interests and their language learning. Therefore, it can make the lessons more enjoyable.

#### **3.2.3 Song Facilitates the Pronunciation Acquisition**

Handcock (2002) claimed that songs are ideal for practicing pronunciation. Maley (Nunan, 1991) put it that fragments of songs stick in our minds. It seems that their poignant phrases keep repeating themselves in our inward ear without our conscious will and often stay in our memory for a long time. This retention is partly attributed to the highly rhythmical feature of songs. It’s the repeated patterns of sound and stress in regular sequences that facilitate language learners’ acquisition.

Songs offer significant and meaningful input for learners. Thorn Bury (2002) says that in lyrics, words usually appear in context, the sound of new words is more memorable along with the melody. By listening to the music, students are exposed the new vocabulary. The context and the repeated listening prompt the comprehension of their meaning and pronunciation. This leads to their further motivation to learn how to

speak all the new words in the song. It means they have to get their tongues around difficult sounds and imitate linguistic features that are different from their first language. By this way, their pronunciation is improved in a natural way.

### **3.3 Principles of Effective Song Deployment**

In her investigation about the use of songs in her school, Vãn, V.T.H (2012) found out that her teaching mates did not grasp a full understanding or make an optimal use of the pedagogical values of songs. Besides, the accompanied tasks and activities are not diverse. These factors added by the students' low English proficiency and limited class time which result in an unsatisfying effect of songs on the learners' language acquisition. Her findings brought her to the conclusion that basic principles of using songs must be observed by teachers to achieve the teaching purpose. They include: the aim of using songs, choosing songs, designing tasks from songs. Her findings will, therefore, serve as a frame work for this paper.

#### **3.3.1 The Aim of using Songs**

Tomlinson, B (1998) stated that "material" refers to "anything which is used by teachers to facilitate the learning of a language". Deployed in English class to promote the learners' pronouncing capability, songs play the undeniable role of a teaching material. Therefore, their use must serve a linguistic purpose. In other words, when planning to introduce a song in their class, teacher must have a clear linguistic aim in their mind, that is, a reason for teaching something about English language.

B. Rais, D. Pranowo, Rr. Sari (2020) also confirmed that the teachers need to consider with the learning objective in the application of song in teaching. For example, if their aim is to improve the students' pronunciation for daily communication purpose, the lyric of the song need contain with the everyday vocabulary.

### **3.4 Choosing Songs**

Needless to say, choosing appropriate songs is one of the key stages because it plays a decisive role in the success of pronunciation teaching and learning in an EFL class. While stating that any songs can be an example of different pronunciation aspects, Stanculea and Bran (2015) had the same view point with Alsadae, Sase (2022) who advised that songs should be carefully selected. The proper songs should not have many slangs and difficult words. The best ones for learning English are not too long, not too fast, comprehensible, memorable, likely to appeal to the learners and easy to create activities for, depending on the pronunciation aspect, the teachers are focusing on.

Rais, Pranowo and Sari (2020) claimed that a choice of songs needs to be linked with the teaching objectives and increases students' learning interest. Besides, knowing their English level can help the teachers to select appropriate songs with vocabulary in accordance with their language proficiency. Sharing the same point of view, Brian Tomlinson (1998) further added song features: music type, length, speed, linguistic content and features to make sure they are properly chosen.

To sum up, a teacher should consider the students' English competency and interests, the song characteristics and linguistic input to make their choice of songs successful in promoting their learners' pronunciation skill.

### **3.5 Designing Tasks from Songs**

To develop learners' pronunciation productively through the cultivation of songs, pedagogical tasks need to be appropriately designed. According to Brian Tomlinson (1998) tasks and activities associated with songs should help learners feel at ease and develop confidence. He advised teachers not to design too difficult tasks which may make learners feel tense or worry about finishing them and lose interests in

learning with songs next time. In addition, the designed tasks should focus on the linguistic aspect, the teachers are going to teach and the students' mastery of the language. Other factors such as song's lyrics, vocabulary, difficulty level, the rhythm and speed, the difficulty level of the tasks should be taken into consideration to ensure that the tasks are planned properly and effectively.

A number of researchers (Christiano, 2009; Keskin, 2011; Montaner, 2006, Ludke, 2009; cited in Castelo (2018)) thought tasks should be designed in three major stages: pre listening, listening and post-listening in order to exploit songs effectively. In the pre-listening phase, teachers should prepare learners for the listening by contextualizing the activity, motivating them and providing them necessary tools to perform the listening task. (new vocabulary, background information about the singer, clear instruction about the task to be carried out during the listening phase). The listening phase should promote students' good understanding of the songs and focus their attention on the relevant requirements to fulfill the tasks. In the post listening stage, several activities can be performed to develop the linguistic skills associated with the songs.

## **4 Factors Affecting the Effectives of Song Deployment in Hufi Pronunciation Class**

### **4.1 The Aim of using Songs**

An informal discussion with the researcher's mates in the pronunciation teaching team reveals that all of them are well aware of the pedagogical value of songs on improving Hufi students' pronouncing skill. They are highly passionate in applying them into their class, however, they can not do it frequently because of a lack of time and heavy teaching content. It is even worse when they have to acknowledge the fact that they mainly play songs in their class to boost their learners' learning motivation or to help them relax their mind. Although they also set linguistic purposes for their music deployment but only limit to some pronunciation aspects such as: stress, connected speech, final ending sounds.

### **4.2 Choosing Songs**

As confirmed by various literature, song selection is one of the most important steps in the successful implementation of songs as a teaching aid. Nonetheless, all the informants say that their decisions about which piece of music to deploy base on their interests, its suitability with the pronunciation elements they want to draw their student's attention to. They do not consult their learners' opinion. That's why, they also feel a mismatch in interests between them, which, they suppose, is a result of different tastes of art due to generation gap. Clearly, students have their own favorite songs, singers and types of music. They may have no idea about the songs, the singers or they music bands introduced by their teachers. Undoubtedly, they may not enjoy the music. This problem would adversely affect the usefulness of this power tool in achieving the teaching and learning objectives. Another difficulty with the teachers is that they are not well – equipped with any literature about criteria to make a productive selection of songs. They only do it with the support of their own experience. This is, obviously, a barrier to make most of songs in their pronunciation class.

### **4.3 Designing Tasks from Songs**

As a negative result of time constraint in class and a lack of formal training, all the author's team mates admit the truth that all the tasks and activities associated with their selected songs are not well – designed. Many songs may be embraced with clear linguistic purposes but they only aim at raising students' awareness of specific pronouncing features or providing them a chance to practice understanding the meaning, recognize the pronunciation differences governed by grammar or contexts. Therefore, their students miss golden opportunities to drill as soon as they have learnt in class.

These above-mentioned reasons also attribute to another negative factor that hinder the effectiveness of songs in Hufi pronunciation class. That is the tedious and simple activities. The most commonly deployed one is gap – filling with some additional requirements related to pronunciation areas. When students know in advance what they are expected to do. They certainly feel less excited and may lose interests. Some teachers say that they are aware of the importance of plans related to how song plans are used in their class but gap – filling is probably the best choice for multi – level classes of 50 students, many of them still have very poor comprehension skill.

## **5 Suggestions**

In an attempt to develop English majored – students’ communicative competence in Hufi, a master of pronunciation is vitally needed. Thus, the introduction of songs to improve this linguistic aspect, undeniably, can bring about promising results. In light of above analysis of on - going problems, the following suggestions have been come up with:

First, a study should be done to find out students’ favorite songs, their types of music. This can be done with their suggestions and with their choice from a list of songs suggested by teachers. Their participation in the selection process can comprise the interest differences with their teachers. After a collection of well - selected songs have been produced, a music library for pronunciation practice should be created with a variety of well - developed tasks and activities associated to develop students’ autonomous learning outside class. This music compilation should be classified according to levels to meet different learning needs of the students.

Second, the pronunciation course in Hufi should be lengthened. Ten – class meetings are not sufficient for Hufi English majored learners who come from different background with different language proficiency. This limited period of time also poses a big challenge for teachers to introduce new teaching tools in general and to cultivate songs in particular. The needs to cover the heavily loaded syllabus will make them turn a blind eye on any time – consuming activities.

Last but not least, a training course should be provided for all teachers of pronunciation to equip them basic knowledge about criteria to choose songs with highly pedagogical values and techniques for designing efficient song – related tasks. Their group work after that will certainly bring them a list of systematically developed song related tasks to meet every lesson objective.

## **6 Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the merits of songs in boosting learners’ pronunciation skill – the central part of communicative competence - is undeniable. However, their successful application is a matter that deserves a deep investigation. Due to limited time and conditions, the author of this research only make an attempt to explore the hindrance factors impeding the productive exploitation of songs in pronunciation class in her own teaching setting. Her study is carried out with the deployment of various related research and an informal discussion with her teaching mates. The findings have pointed out a short of time, an intensive syllabus, multi – level classes, big class size, a lack of formal training for teacher, a mismatch between teachers and students’ perception of interesting songs, poorly – designed tasks are the main culprits for the unsatisfactory results of song application in Hufi pronunciation class. Basing on the findings, a number of suggestions have been made in order to improve the efficiency of this valuable teaching aid, namely a production of a song collection for pronunciation learning and teaching with the participation of students, an extended course for pronunciation and an arrangement of a training course for teachers to provide them necessary skills to develop productive teaching materials from songs.

## Author Biography

Huong, N.T.M is a lecturer at Hochiminh University of Food Industry. She is a holder of TESOL M.A. During her 20 years teaching English, she has been keen on improving her students' communication skills. She believes that most Vietnamese students still need to work hard on their pronunciation in order to become orally competent. Regarding research, she has concentrated on studying various ways to improve the learning and teaching of English in her institution with an ambition to equip her students with the most needed soft skill at workplace nowadays.

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