NGHIÊN CỨU VIỆC SỬ DỤNG PHẢN HỒI THƯỜNG XUYÊN NHẰM NÂNG CAO KHẢ NĂNG PHÁT ÂM TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KINH TẾ - KỸ THUẬT CÔNG NGHIỆP

AN ACTION RESEARCH ON THE USE OF CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL INDUSTRIES

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Tóm tắt: Phát âm là phần không thể thiếu của việc học ngôn ngữ bởi vì không có nó chúng ta sẽ gặp rất nhiều khó khăn trong việc giao tiếp với nhau. Đặc biệt, người học là người Việt Nam chưa hiểu sâu rộng về cách phát âm tiếng Anh, thậm chí cả những người mong muốn trở thành giáo viên hay người phiên dịch tiếng Anh tương lai. Vấn đề này xuất phát từ thực tế là người học thiếu sự phản hồi thường xuyên về phát âm từ các giáo viên tiếng Anh của họ từ các khía cạnh khác nhau của phát âm. Vì vậy nghiên cứu hành động này đã được thực hiện nhằm tìm ra các câu trả lời cho ba câu hỏi nghiên cứu: (1) Lí do dẫn đến việc sinh viên phát âm kém là gì? (2) Các vấn đề mà sinh viên thường gặp khi phát âm các ký hiệu phụ âm tiếng Anh là gì? (3) Phản hồi thường xuyên có thể nâng cao khả năng phát âm cho sinh viên không? Nếu có thì trong phạm vi nào?

Từ khóa: Phát âm kém, cải thiện, phản hồi liên tục.

Abstract: It has been acknowledged that pronunciation is an essential part of language learning, because without it, people would meet a lot of difficulties in communicating with each other. Especially, Vietnamese learners don't have deep knowledge of English pronunciation. This is true even for those who wish to become teachers or interpreters of English in the future. This problem comes largely from the fact that these learners lack continuous feedback from their teachers of English regarding different pronunciation aspects. Therefore, the current situation has urged the researcher to carry out the present action research, aiming at finding answers to three research questions: (1) What are the possible reasons that lead to students'weak pronunciation? (2) What are the students' most common problems regarding English consonants sounds? (3) Can continuous feedback improve students' English pronunciation? If yes, to what extend?

Keywords: Weak pronunciation, improve, continuous feedback.

1. INTRODUCTION

The trend of globalization in every field all over the world has given English a greater role than ever before so speaking plays an essential role. As O'Connor (2002) stated "clear, concise feedback matched to standards will promote students' achievement". Feedback plays a very important role in the teaching of any foreign language skill because without it, students would have a vague picture of what they are really weak at and what they need to improve. As for pronunciation, feedback is more important. This is because only when

students are adequately informed about their particular pronunciation problems, and helped to make genuine sounds before moving to the complex issues of pronunciation such as intonation and elision, can they focus more on what their personal problems are and invest more time and effort to improve them.

However, learners face the problems of pronunciation. I have witnessed many cases in which students can do pronunciation exercises, but fail to have proper pronunciation in their real-life speaking. The problem lies in the fact that students don't receive adequate feedback from the teachers on their pronunciation performance. Some students even don't know how to form certain sounds in English. Therefore, it is impossible for them to have genuine production of sounds and sentences. They hardly have enough time to pay attention and give correction to all students' pronunciation. As a result, students are unable to identify their weak aspects. All of these motivated me to conduct an action research on the use of continuous feedback with the aim at improving the students' English pronunciation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Continuous feedback is defined as a mechanism or a process where a learner receives ongoing feedback and is guided in a systematic manner by openly discussing the strengths and do, check and act. Then we also get four benefits including helping create a healthy workplace culture, helping learners and organization set better, boosting morale and appreciation from clients. In teaching, continuous feedback is defined as "continuous comments of information learner receive on the success of a learning task, either from the teacher or from other learners". Without proper feedback from teacher, learners would be at a loss of specifying their own position in their process of studying a foreign language. David (2000) stated that "Specific, descriptive feedback that focuses on success and points the way to improvement has a positive effect." The purpose of providing feedback to vowels and consonants pronunciation is to provide opportunities for the leaner to make adjustments and improvements toward mastery of a specified standard." A vast number of researches have been carried out to find out factors that may affect students' pronunciation. These are briefly summarized in Teaching English Pronunciation by Joanne Kenworthy (1987) including the native language, the age factor, amount exposure, phonetic ability, attitude and identity, motivation and concern for good pronunciation and the teacher's role. The teacher has to perform the following roles: helping learner hear, helping learner make sounds, providing feedback, devising activities, assessing progress. However, the research focuses on the use of feedbacks and learners' improvement. Roach (2000:10) defined consonant sounds as "sounds in which there is obstruction to the flow of air as it passes the larynx to the lips". As they were the main issue of this research, I would like to propose the classification of English consonant sounds in Table 1 below.

Table 1. English consonant sounds

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glotal
Plosive	+ b -p			+d -t		+g -k		

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glotal
Fricative		+v	+ ð	+z -s	+ ʒ - ʃ			-h
Affricative		+f	- θ		+ dʒ - tʃ			
Nasal	+m			+n			+ ŋ	
Lateral				+l				
Approximant	+w				+r	+j		

Note: +is for voiced sounds

  -is for voiceless sounds.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Current situation of teaching pronunciation at UNETI

In their first semester, first year students at UNETI have six periods of English per week. The pronunciation lesson is incorporated into speaking lessons and lasts two periods, accounting for 90 minutes. A lot of problems can be seen from this. Firsly, this short length of time is obviously too little to be effective enough for students. Secondly, even in speaking lessons, it is difficult for the teachers to devote much time for the teaching of pronunciation due to big class model. The teachers can't pay attention and correct to the pronunciation of every student. What they can actually do is to discover some most typical mistakes and may bring it before the class after the discussion has finished. The only time when the teacher can give feedback to students' performance individually is when they stand up and make a presentation. However, the maximum time for this is only up to 45 minutes, which means feedback can only be provided to seven or eight students in class so it is necessary that students are to provide proper training, especially in the initial step of their study. At least, they must have taught how to

pronounce certain sounds correctly before moving on to linking sounds and intonation.

3.2. Background and instruments

20 students of Garment classs were selected on the basis of cluster sampling and the material used to teach pronunciation was ''Ship or Sheep''. In order to ensure the validity, a number of different instruments were implemented such as: observation, questionnaire, interviews, mock speaking tests, passages and the reseacher also gave the specific strategy including feedback forms (in-class feedback and out-of-class feedback) and feedback types (corrective feedback, auditory feedback and delayed auditory feedback).

3.3. Research program

The research was conducted in 15 weeks of the first semester. The researcher found out that most students don't mispronounce every English consonan sounds like /v/ and /f/. In contrast, there are a number of sounds that they can't have proper pronunciation such as /ʃ/, /ð/ and /θ/. Bearing in mind that those sounds should receive continuous feedback from the teachers through mock speaking tests and interviews, the researcher worked out a research program in which the sounds she considered to be most troublesome were taught before the others.

Table 2. An overview of the research program

Week	In-class		Out-class
	Course book (20 minutes)	**Research program (25 minutes)**	
1	Introduction and orientation	Introduction to the research program Questionnaire	Interview 1
2	Unit 1	Sounds /ð/ and /θ/	Mock speaking test
3	Unit 2	Sounds /ʃ/ and /tʃ/	
4	Unit 3	Sounds /dʒ/ and /ʒ/	
5	Unit 4	Revision 2	Passage 1
6	Revision	Sounds /s/ and /z/	
7	Unit 5	Sounds /d/ and /t/	
8	Self-study	Sounds /b/ and /p/	Passage 2
9	Unit 6	Sounds /f/ and /v/	
10	Unit 7	Revision 1	
11	Unit 8 Pronunciation assignment (Group 1)	Sounds /g/,/w/ and /j/	Passage 3
12	Pronunciation assignment (Group 2 & 3)	Sounds /l/ and /r/	
13	Pronunciation assignment (Group 4 & 5)	Sounds /ð/ and /θ/	Passage 4
14	Pronunciation assignment (Group 6)	Sounds /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/	
15	Revision	Revision 3	Mock speaking test Interview 2

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Students' problems with English consonant sounds

In order to justify the effectiveness of the research, the researcher audio-recorded two mock speaking tests at the beginning and at the end of research program. Each mock speaking test consisted of two parts: a passage for each student to read aloud and a discussion which students have to work in pairs to do. The results were collected as follows.
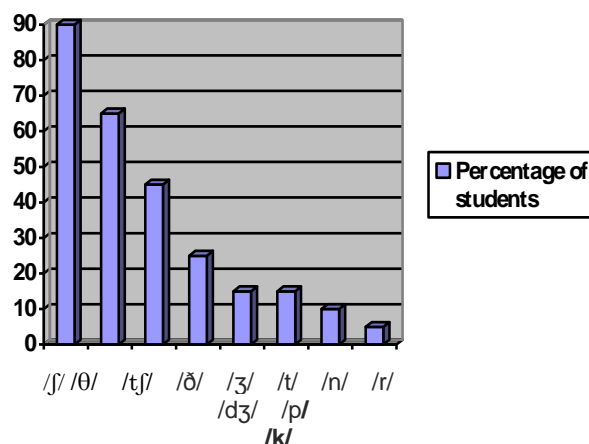

Chart 1. English consonant sounds that the students mispronounced

As we can see, most students had problems with palato-alveolar fricatives, 90% of the students mispronounced /ʃ/, and sometimes mispronounced /ʒ/. In addition, their mouth were not round enough to make a full production of it. The students substituted this sound with the fricative /s/. Similarly, as for the sound /ʒ/, students tended to replace it with the fricative /z/, or the Vietnamese sound /d/. In short, they pronounced these two sounds like the way they pronounced Vietnamese sounds. The second group they mispronounced was dental sounds /θ/ with 65% and /ð/ with 25%. Some students pronounced these two sounds like Vietnamese sounds "th" and "gi".

Another group of sounds that caused problems for students was palato-alveolar affricatives /tʃ/ with 45% and /dʒ/ with 15%. They pronounced like Vietnamese sounds like "tr" and "d". A minority of the students mispronounced other English sounds. 15% of them mispronounced English voiceless plosive sounds /t/, /p/, /k/. Instead, they made them become voiced sounds like /t/, /p/, /k/ in Vietnamese. In addition, 10% of them could't pronounce the sound /n/ but replaced it with/l/. Surprisingly, a student (5%) couldn't pronounce /r/ and substituted it with /l/.

In sum, students tended to mispronounce English sounds that don't exist in Vietnamese. Moreover, some students' mispronunciation was due to their personel background, such as their birthplaces or their phonetic ability. One of the most crucial reasons why the students failed to realize their pronunciation problem was that they had noone to practise speaking with. The students rarely used English to talk with their friends during the time at classes, except for the time they were asked to do certain speaking tasks in the book, but the amount of time devoted it was very limited. Apart from the class time, the students hardly spoke English anymore. Unlike in a hostel of a university where there are many other students studying English, these secondary school students would come home after class, and there was no one in their family with whom they could practise English. Fortunately, despite the students' pronunciation was weak, they all seemed to have a very positive attitude towards the mastery of English pronunciation. They said good pronunciation brought them a great sense of satisfaction, motivation as well as confidence. These are actually decisive factors to success in the process of learning and acquiring anything, and English pronuncuiation in particular.

4.2. Comparision of the students' pronunciation performance in the pretest and the posttest

At the end of the research, I conducted another mock speaking test to give continuous feedbacks to students to see whether they had made any improvements regarding their pronunciation of different English consonants sounds. The comparision between the students' pronunciation in the pretest and posttest was shown in the following chart.
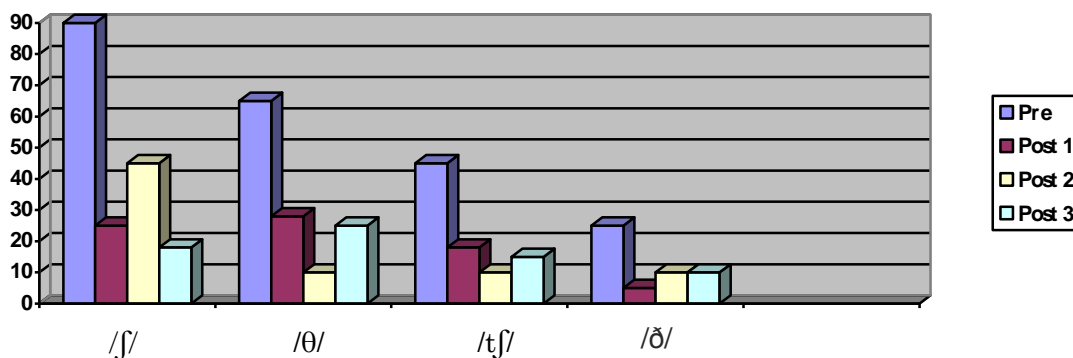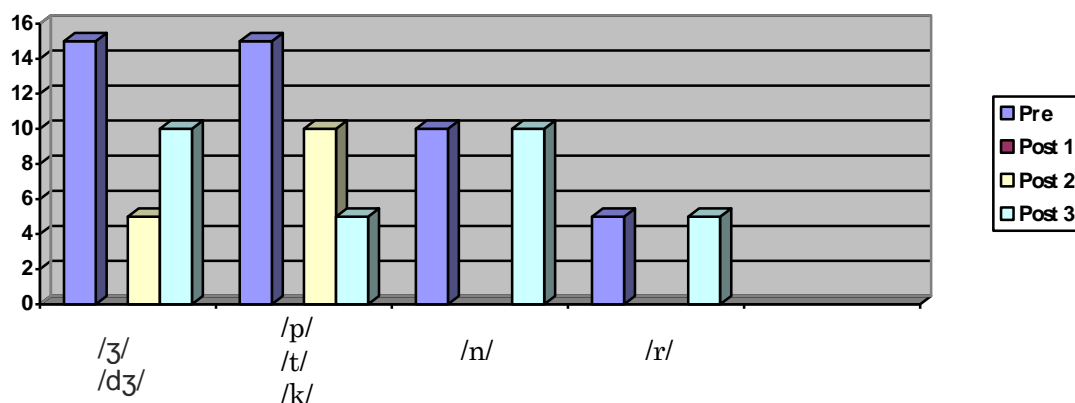
Chart 2. Comparison of the students' pronunciation performance in the pretest and the posttest

Pre: The percentage of students who mispronounced the sound in the pretest.

Post 1: The percentage of students who didn't mispronounce the sound in the posttest.

Post 2: The percentage of students who sometimes mispronounced the sound in the posttest.

Post 3: The percentage of students who still mispronounced the sound in the posttest.

The data showed that the students seemed to make more progress for the sounds that the majority of them mispronounced by the minority. The number of students who made complete or partly improvement regarding their pronunciation of the first four sounds /ʃ/, /θ/, /tʃ/, /ð/, it accounted for more than 50% among those who had mispronounced the sound in the pretest. Among the consonant sounds, the sound /ʃ/ was the most difficult one. After the research, only 25% could make a complete improvement, 45% still made mistakes sometimes. As for the next three sounds /θ/, /tʃ/, /ð/, the percentage of students who couldn't make progress was still significant, accounting for 25%, 15%, and 10% respectively. However, the feature that seemed to be most troublesome was the fact that students seemed to make no significant improvement

regarding the rest of English consonant sounds, namely /ʒ/, /dʒ/,/p/ /t/, /k/, /n/, /r/. No complete improvement was made, whereas the number of students who still mispronounced the two sounds /n/, /r/ remained the same, standing at 10% and 5% respectively.

Among the sounds, the students made most progress with the sounds /ʃ/ and /tʃ/. This was due to the fact that they are somehow "familiar" with the Vietnamese sounds "s" and "tr". The only difference between English and Vietnamese sounds are that the former are palato-alveolar whereas the later are alveolar. Thus, students found it easier to articulate the sounds. The students'progress with the sound /ð/ was very low because they mispronounced it right from the beginning and this was not corrected for many years, it became fossilised and they seemed to be unable to correct it at later phases. As for the two sounds /dʒ/ and /ʒ/, the progress was not significant. Noone could correct completely. Although they had been trained on the pronunciation of these sounds, they didn't use them regularly in their English lessons. As a result, after sometime, they seemed to forget about the mispronunciation. With the sounds /p/,/t/ and /k/ they still mispronounced because they used these sounds a lot in their lessons. At

first, they paid attention to them and tried to pronounce them correctly. However, after sometime, they seemed to focus on how to express their ideas, the content of their speech. Thus, their focus shifted from accuracy to fluency. By this time, they were not aware that they failed to pronounce them correctly.

In sum, the use of continuous feedback through mock speaking tests and interviews in the pretest and posttest has proved to be effective in improving students' pronunciation. The progress of the students was quite significant regarding the sounds that the majority mispronounced. Nevertheless, they made less improvement for the sounds that were "less frequently" mispronounced.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Increasing the amount of feedback to students

Increasing the amount of corrective feedback: The teacher should create more opportunities for students to involve in pair work and group work. During the time they work, the teacher should move around and identify the pronunciation problems and their mispronunciation of English sounds. Then she/he should draw the attention from the whole class to the pronunciation mistakes that most of them make. Some drilling exercises should be given, so that students are fully aware of their mistakes.

Increasing the amount of delayed auditory feedback: Each teacher should have a recorder to record the students' discussion or presentation. Their voive can be played back for the whole class to listen to. In this way, the students will pay more attention to their accuracy of English while speaking. Besides,

they will have a vivid example of how they make mistakes regarding English pronunciation and English sounds.

5.2. Increasing the amount and quality of language input

The students had little chance to listen to authentic English, combined with the fact that the pronunciation of Vietnamese teachers was not good enough. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure the provision of high-quality language input. Teachers must be provided with more training on pronunciation so that they could really act as a model for the students to follow.

5.3. Focusing more on self-study following the credit-based approach

Teachers required students to spend more time at home to practise English sounds. Each week, all students will be given a wordlist, or passage ro read at home. They are to record it and bring to the class the next week. The teacher will pick up students at random and let the whole class justify how well those students had done it, and how to improve the reading.

5.4. Organising mock speaking test to find out the students' pronunciation problems right at the beginning of the first year

The mock speaking test used in the research showed that whereas some students share the same pronunciation problems, others have the problems of their own. It will not be student-centred learning if no attention is paid to the mistakes that the minority of the students make. Therefore, it is advisable that at the first year, a mock speaking test is delivered to every student. They can do this in pairs or individually. This help to find out the most common problems from the students. Furthermore, it is stated clearly in the

credit-based approach that teacher must find ways to check whether the students have done their homework so that teacher could replace the time they have to work at home by going to university and providing feedback to students directly.

In conclusion, the study provided an insight into the most common pronunciation problems regarding consonant sounds. It also justified the effectiveness of continuous feedback on the students' pronunciation. Overall, the results showed that there was a significant improvement to the pronunciation of the participants. They also served as a basic ground for some pedagogical implications, which required more effort from the teachers in their teaching process. It was also clear that if combined with the present trend of applying credit-based approach, teachers would be more willing to involve in such a research program. It is much hoped that the study would be much beneficial to teachers of English regarding the aspects of English pronunciation they should focus on when teaching Vietnamese student.

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