

Some Common Ways for Students to Improve Pronunciation during Covid-19 Pandemic

Nguyen Truong Gia Minh

Hoa Sen University, Vietnam

Correspondence: Nguyen Truong Gia Minh, Hoa Sen University, Vietnam. E-mail: giaminhnguyentruong@gmail.com

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Abstract

We cannot deny that pronunciation skill plays an essential role in our lives in this integration era. If we have good pronunciation, we can have a chance to get a good job. However, as I researched before, many Vietnamese people nowadays are stuck in pronunciation when speaking English. It means that students can still express their ideas about particular issues. Still, their worst accents may make the listeners misunderstand essential information because they could not wholly hear what students have said. Therefore, this study aims to research learning and to teach English via analyzing some related scientific articles. Besides, we also found a way to learn pronunciation online effectively when the Covid-19 pandemic still occurs everywhere in Ho Chi Minh City, which can help students still protect their health and gain new knowledge at the same time. On the other hand, we also found some helpful exercises that can help students practice pronunciation by themselves after class.

Keywords: pronunciation skill, integration era, online learning, teachers, Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Speaking skills play an important role in language learning and teaching nowadays, and pronunciation is also an important part of this skill. In the integration era, Vietnamese people have more chances to communicate with foreigners in dealing with a contract, holding a trade promotion, and signing an MOU. If the manager has good speaking skills and good pronunciation that can help the international partners understand the message that we would like to express, their deals may be successful. Therefore, in this paper, the author will introduce the real definition of pronunciation in English speaking activities and the benefits that it brings to the students to help them communicate with the foreigners effectively, and if they achieve a good style of speaking, they will get a good chance in their future career.

The most effective way for students to practice speaking is a face-to-face method in the traditional class. At this time, they can organize many activities to improve their pronunciation. However, because the pandemic of Covid-19 is occurring strongly in Ho Chi Minh City. Most

classes have changed into the online form. It means that students do not have many chances to practice the skill with the teachers/friends, and they must spend much time practicing the skills at home by themselves and this article will point out some effective ways to modify their accents.

To help students improve their pronunciation by themselves, internet and mobile applications and even the traditional coursebook are the most convenient means to help students boost their skills and avoid mistakes while speaking to each other.

According to Norris-Holt (2005), motivation plays an important role in helping students to achieve their goals in learning English or even other foreign languages. It is also a factor that assesses the level of student success in learning ESL as well as another second language. Shaaban (2002) expressed the idea that motivation is also one factor that identifies students' success in learning a second language.

On the other hand, according to Prasant (2018), the students who have worse pronunciation may feel lonely, face-off with difficulties in finding a job, and may be seen as uneducated with superficial knowledge in pronunciation and phonetics.

Besides learning pronunciation skills via online platforms nowadays, Van et al. (2021) and Nguyen (2021) stated that gadgets nowadays are the key tools that help students to improve their English level. On the other hand, Bhatti (2021) showed that information technology has helped teachers to access new information in recent years and helps students to expand their knowledge easily

2. Literature review

a. What is pronunciation?

According to Dalton and Seidholfers (1994), pronunciation is an activity in which the speakers produce sounds to each other. This activity aims to bring meaningful expression messages from speakers to listeners. This activity relates to some factors like intonation, stress, rhythms, phrasing, and timing.

On the other hand, Pourhosein (2016) stated that this is a product of English sounds. Students learn to pronounce words by repeating the sounds they heard, and when they get wrong, teachers will correct their mistakes immediately.

In addition, pronunciation is also a way to speak out one word that is accepted by the crowd.

b. The importance of pronunciation in learning English

According to Underhill (2010), the four reasons below are really helpful to make pronunciation become an important part of learning English. Firstly, pronunciation can be applied to learn other listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Secondly, pronunciation

also helps us to improve our listening skills. Besides, it is also a physical side of language, and it impacts our self-esteem.

In addition, if students can read and write well, but they do not pronounce well, it also means that they still cannot acquire the knowledge of the language well. Therefore, if the students would like to succeed in learning a language, the teachers' teaching method is really important.

c. Some helpful tips to improve pronunciation

There are many ways to improve our pronunciation skills. Thanks to Lewis (2020), we have discovered some good ways to help us boost our pronunciation up to a new level. Firstly, students should learn to hear each sound correctly. From that, they can distinguish the differences between all sounds, such as two couples, “l” and “r”, “sh” and “ch”. Secondly, they should practice the movement of the mouth. Pronunciation is a mixture of some activities from many parts of our face like lips, tongue, throat, and jaw. Thirdly, they should use the podcast to learn English, record the hard-to-remember words and repeat them until they can remember them all. Fourthly, let's apply the shadowing method. It means they should repeat all the words that they can hear from the podcasts. Fifthly, they should record themselves to identify their mistakes to improve their pronunciation. Finally, they must spend much time practicing speaking. When they try hard to speak, it also means they can change the way of pronunciation.

d. Some tips for teaching English online for teachers

According to Bhagan (2021), some helpful conditions could help the teachers prepare good online English periods. Firstly, they should pay a lot of money for teaching devices such as the best laptops and high-quality webcam and headphones. Besides, you also need to have enough RAM to make the teaching programs work.

In addition, Benwell (2011) showed some tips that teachers could simplify our online lessons. Firstly, teachers should encourage students to come to the class regularly. Then, teachers will list out some problematic phonemes for students to remember. Next, teachers work on the intonation problems. Simultaneously, teachers also need to emphasize each problematic phoneme for students to apply correctly while they pronounce the word. After that, they must remember the pacing and apply the linking word to make their speech more smooth. Students should also listen to the different accents from different English-speaking countries to improve their listening comprehension skills. After all, they answer the focused question.

2.1 Research Questions

To support the purpose of the study, the investigation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Which are the best teaching methods that help students to improve their pronunciation?
2. How can teachers support the students' process of learning pronunciation skills at home?

3. Methods

3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted online by researching the available articles and some available theses. Then the writer will analyze the final result via her own opinions and the articles' authors.

3.2 Design of the Study

This research will use a qualitative method for consuming time, and the method we will apply is content analysis. Although the online learning process occurs easily, the complex process of collecting research data from students via online forms seems not simple. In fact, we should spend really much time brainstorming about the forms of the questions, the arrangement of the forms and we should also spend many hours to attract the students to join in the survey as well as continuously follow the numbers of the participants. It will take us very much time and cause stress. Therefore, it is better to know how to collect data from scientific articles to get all of them easily and not spend many hours for the analysis process.

4. Analysis

a. Tools

As we know that, the data we can take from this method includes a graph, images, texts, etc. On the other hand, in this Covid-19 pandemic, the author did not have many good conditions to go out to collect the data. Therefore, this is a good way to serve the aim of this research. According to Bhasin (2020), content analysis brings the researcher a lot of advantages.

Firstly, it reveals the differences in communication in the different contexts. Next, it also showed the relations of some information that we used for showing to the audiences. Thirdly, it shows the international differences in the content of communication in the different contexts. It also detects the reality of expressing information and bias in communication as well as the other types of communication. In addition, it also describes the reaction of the participants clearly.

5. Results

The author will divide this section into two small parts. Firstly, we will list some exercises that students can practice by themselves at home. Secondly, the result will also show the way that teachers can support the students to learn English online as well as assess the results of the process of self-learning English.

At first, after researching some articles, the writer has detected some of the prominent methods and types of exercise which help students to improve their pronunciation skills.

a. Students' practice exercises

According to Purwanto (2019), there are four types of exercises that can help students to improve their pronunciation:

- *Read aloud*

In this exercise, students receive a small word pronunciation exercise at home. It may include some vocabulary or the whole passage. Especially in the example below, this exercise aims to help students read the words that can cause mistakes with the other two in the same line. This word aims to help the students hear what their mouth expresses and avoid the mistake; they can stand in front of the mirror to see the movement of their mouth and hear the sounds that they produce. From that, they can modify the errors they have made when speaking English. The three sentences below will strongly represent examples that can help students modify their pronunciation styles, like the sound "ed" and "th".

- 1) Bead Bed Bid
- 2) Catched crashed occupied coughed
- 3) Through author clothes thumb

- *Listen and Repeat*

This activity can help students boost their level of pronunciation up and modify the pronunciation style. In this activity, students will listen to the whole text or conversation for the first time. Then, the second time, they will hear each sentence in the conversation and repeat it with the whole class or by themselves. After the third time, they still make mistakes; teachers will help them to correct their errors. The most important thing about this activity is that they should turn on their camera for teachers to follow their mouth movement.

- *Tongue Twister*

This method aims to help students have a good reflex in speaking English when they must read a sentence containing the words that have the same initial syllable, which is really difficult to say. They should read these sentences at a fast speed to practice controlling the way they pronounce that string of words. As much they practice, as they can improve their pronunciation style. There are some samples of the tongue-twister sentence below:

- 1) She sees many ships by the sea-shore
- 2) She saw the shade of a see-saw.
- 3) She sells a shell in a sea-shore.
- 4) This shoe-brush is sold in a shop

- *Recording of Learner's Production*

At the end of the course, the learner can record their voice when they tell the stories or sing a song to identify the mistakes and correct them fast. On the other hand, Maurin (2018) advised the students to learn the phonetic alphabet because when they remember the alphabet, they can distinguish the differences between each sound to have an exact pronunciation for the syllables, which has the same way of reading. Next, he suggested that students should clearly understand the spoken language rules. If they use the spoken language much, the way they pronounce the word of this language becomes more easily. If students have difficulty pronouncing a word, let ask other people to repeat that word, and students will record their

voice to remember the way of speaking the word. Then, they should listen to the radio as much as possible to identify the fluent pronunciation, and they can copy the way the character pronounces the hard word. Finally, do not stop practicing pronunciation by themselves to improve their skills every day.

There are seven ways to improve pronunciation that Maurin (2018) has cited in his paper. However, in this paper, the author has just taken 3 of them because these ways seem so easy to conduct, and we should not spend much time and money for them to improve our pronunciation skills. Every day we need to spend one hour applying one of these ways, and this process must happen continuously in one month to get the highest efficiency. It is also easy for us to find the materials for practicing like CDs or television for listening, a repeating e-book for a tongue twister, and the telephone for recording learners' production.

From these analyses, I also agree with Van et al. (2021)'s opinion that is when students apply technology for learning English. They will recognize the effectiveness of all four macro skills, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

b. How can teachers support students in English pronunciation?

In learning English, especially in pronunciation activities, the teacher plays the role of a coach to check and guide the way students pronounce the words. While helping students, they should control some factors such as speech production and speech performance of the students. Besides, they should help students make long-term and short-term plans, do group work on online platforms, work with the record system, and analyze each student's fluency level. Finally, they should tell students to change their awareness of their wrong pronunciation and encourage them to change their pronunciation actively, and they will control the changing process of their students.

6. Conclusion

As we know, in this integration era, pronunciation skills become more and more important with students in their future careers and their lives. However, if the students do not know the effective ways of learning this skill, they cannot pronounce English fluently.

Besides, there are many ways for students to learn pronunciation by themselves at home. The most important thing that students should do now is try their best to learn English pronunciation by themselves, applying all of the methods cited in this article.

Simultaneously, the teacher also plays a vital role in students' self-learning process via online platforms to help them be confident with their ability when they learn at home. According to Kologdarh (2010), teachers should care about the needs and problems of pronunciation. This author also shows that teachers should have a detailed assessment for students to improve their pronunciation skills and avoid errors.

On the other hand, teachers also need to help students distinguish British English and American English in different ways of pronouncing one word between two different cultures.

From that, students can also improve not only their pronunciation skills but also they can improve their speaking skills and listening skills.

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Biodata

Nguyen Truong Gia Minh is a journalist at Nguoi Lao Dong Newspaper and is currently studying for a Master of English Language at Hoa Sen University, Vietnam. She had 1 year of experience in working as a teacher assistant of English Only Day – An activity for students of University of Economics and Finance (UEF) to improve their English pronunciation. Her academic interest areas are about teaching and training English speaking and writing skills for university students.