

THE POTENTIALS OF UTILIZING KARAOKE ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

*Pham Thi Duong**, *Nguyen Thi Nam**
Email: duongphamfoe@gmail.com

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Abstract: *Karaoke, a form of entertainment that employs a karaoke machine to present audio, visual, and textual information simultaneously, holds potential for language teaching due to its effective combination of language comprehension and verbal expression. This study investigates the impact of karaoke activities on English pronunciation by engaging 27 English major students in five karaoke-based pronunciation learning sessions. Both pretests and posttests, along with survey questionnaires and interviews, were employed to assess changes in participants' pronunciation competency before and after the treatment. The findings demonstrate positive improvement in participants' pronunciation as a result of karaoke activities.*

Keywords: *karaoke activities, English pronunciation, language comprehension, verbal expression.*

I. Introduction

The increasing significance of English as a global means of communication has motivated more individuals worldwide to learn the language for effective spoken interaction. According to Richards & Renandya (2002, p. 201), a majority of language learners worldwide study English to improve their speaking proficiency. However, mastering spoken English proves challenging for many EFL learners. Fraser (2000) emphasizes that speaking is the most intricate skill to develop. Furthermore, pronunciation plays a critical role in spoken communication while vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics are vital sub-skills for speaking, as asserted by Hinkel (2005). Adams-Goertel (2013) highlights that accurate pronunciation plays a crucial part in differentiating meanings and enhancing comprehension. Hişmanoğlu (2006) emphasizes that attaining complete communicative competence heavily relies on pronunciation and Julia (2002) contends that spoken language and oral communication would be non-existent without proper pronunciation.

One of the primary reasons why EFL learners find English pronunciation challenging is the lack of exposure to native English speakers, leading to limited exposure to English phonetics. In order to comprehend and master English pronunciation effectively, EFL learners must engage in extensive and intensive listening and practice. This process enables learners to become familiar with the English sound system, which is crucial for language

* Hung Yen University of Technology and Education

acquisition (Pardede, 2007). Once they are acquainted with the sounds, learners should practice producing them in meaningful and motivating contextual situations. In summary, comprehensive listening and contextual practice play pivotal roles in helping EFL learners acquire a strong grasp of English pronunciation.

Despite recognizing the importance of pronunciation in the English language learning, many language teachers still use traditional approaches to teach pronunciation. Therefore, this method often lacks sufficient engagement and fails to address the specific challenges faced by students. Second-year English major students at Hung Yen University of Technology and Education may encounter difficulties in acquiring accurate English pronunciation due to limited exposure to authentic language environments and inadequate practice opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to explore alternative methods that can effectively enhance English pronunciation skills, while also fostering motivation and engagement among the students.

II. Literature review

2.1. Pronunciation and Its Importance

Harmer (2007) stated that most of the English teachers make their students learn by heart grammar and vocabulary, drill dialogue samples, functional structures, join in productive skill activities (writing and speaking) and try attain competency in listening and reading with only teach pronunciation in passing. Teachers thought that without specific pronunciation teaching, students can acquire a good level of English. However, Harmer asserted, “*The fact that some students are able to acquire reasonable pronunciation without overt pronunciation teaching should not blind us to the benefits of focus on pronunciation in our lesson*” (p.248). Pronunciation is the first thing that people can recognize when they talk to each other. Someone who speaks with low pronunciation level is usually judged as incompetent, uneducated, or a person that lacks in knowledge (Yates, 2002). Furthermore, Pardede (2019) emphasized the communicative learning approach has gained popularity, significantly increasing students' awareness of the vital role pronunciation in achieving successful communication.

Therefore, pronunciation teaching in English language classrooms is surely important to be a focus, not only an attribute in teaching speaking.

Previously, pronunciation instruction typically concentrated on the enunciation of consonants and vowels, as well as distinguishing between similar word pairs. However, in recent times, there has been a shift in focus towards incorporating a wider range of suprasegmental aspects, such as stress and intonation (Pennington, 2019). Both segmental and suprasegmental aspects have an important role in pronunciation. In essence, pronunciation refers to the manner in which a word or a language is spoken. According to Yates (2002), it involves the production of sounds used to convey meaning. It encompasses the way sounds are formed during speech, including both segmental elements like consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental features such as stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, and phrasing. Additionally, pronunciation includes the description of the voice quality. Those aspects are combined when one speaks, and issues in one area can affect others, ultimately determining whether their pronunciation is easy or challenging for others to understand (Gilakjani, 2012; Yates & Zielinski, 2009).

Recognizing these characteristics, it is evident why pronunciation holds considerable importance in oral language ability, and serves as a crucial element of language, conveying diverse meanings. Pennington & Revel (2019) stated that it involved language proficiency on

both small-scale and large-scale levels. This includes the segmental level involving separate phonemes (consonants and vowels) and the supra-segmental or the suprasegmental level of coherent speech, which involves aspects like intonation, stress, and sounds, as well as vocal characteristics and speech articulation.

According to Pardede (2019), possessing proficient pronunciation is essential for effective communication in any language, as good pronunciation necessitates clear making of different aspects such as individual sounds, stress, intonation. He further emphasizes that having good pronunciation is especially crucial for effective communication in English. Consequently, learning proper articulation is one of the essential aspects of linguistic education (Lin, Fan, & Chen, 1995).

The rise in the widespread appeal of communicative verbal learning, which highlights enabling students to use the target language effectively, has been bringing greater consciousness to the crucial part of articulation in giving effective messages. The evaluation of the English proficiency has been primarily evaluated depending on their speech. Poor articulation inevitably has a detrimental effect on general linguistic competence, as it becomes challenging for listeners to get the messages and needs more diligence and attention. This can lead to misunderstandings and hinder effective communication. In contrast, a speaker who speaks well enables hearers to better assess their linguistic competency, even if they make some grammatical errors (Gilakjani, 2012).

Consequently, if the speakers have clear speech, they will be more confident. Moreover, as learning is facilitated by the confidence, a learner having good pronunciation will achieve language better. Gilakjani (2012) asserts the positive effect of pronunciation on supporting language learning while weak articulation leads to significant problems in the studying process. In summary, pronunciation accuracy is vital for effective communication in a language and plays a vital part in the language learning journey.

2.2. Teaching Pronunciation in English Language Classroom

Despite its crucial role in learning a language, the introduction of articulation is largely overlooked in instruction of English as a second language. Nowadays, it is uncommon for instructors to teach it in English language settings. Morley (1991) discovered teachers teaching English in Taiwan do not prioritize English pronunciation for their students, only a few assessments focus on this aspect. Dalton (2002) noted that pronunciation teaching is considered the "Cinderella of language teaching," in Mexico, receiving slight notice during instruction. Wei and Zhou (2002) found that English articulation is also mistreated in some of Thai's colleges. Similarly, Indonesian learners require pronunciation learning, yet most teachers lack the knowledge of what and how to teach in this area (Moedjito, 2008).

Numerous adult learners encounter challenges when it comes to acquiring English pronunciation, considering it to be one of the most difficult aspects of the language. These learners often require explicit guidance and support from their teachers. However, in English language classrooms, the conventional approach of using repetitive drills ("repeat after me") often leads to boredom among students. Consequently, this approach can create a negative perception where students associate pronunciation with dullness and monotony. However, Wong (1993) insisted: "*Pronunciation teaching is not by nature boring, but it is considered this way because it has been taught in a dull way; therefore, a teacher is boring when he or*

she believes pronunciation teaching is boring” (p.46). Thus, the use of fun and innovative method in teaching pronunciation is necessary.

2.3. The Use of Karaoke to Improve Pronunciation

The term "karaoke" originates from the Japanese words "kara," meaning "empty," and "ōke," a shortened version of "ōkesutora," which refers to an orchestra. Karaoke is a device that plays instrumental accompaniments for a selection of songs, allowing users to sing along with the music. Morley (1991) defines it as an entertainment activity that entails utilizing a karaoke machine. Essentially, karaoke serves as the expansion of utilizing music as educational resources in the classroom, supplying audio, visual, and written form simultaneously. This enables learners to participate in singing along with the music, reading the lyrics displayed on a screen when others enjoy the performance. To enable karaoke activity, it is necessary that there be a device to show the lyrics such as a TV, PC monitor, or a projector. Moreover, having a microphone is preferred for an optimal effect, as it enhances the feeling of real singing and makes participants more comfortable.

Various authors in the field of language learning and teaching have examined and discussed the utilization of karaoke as a method to enhance pronunciation. Chen (2011) emphasizes that karaoke provides learners with a unique opportunity for immersive language practice, particularly in pronunciation and intonation. Singing along with the lyrics in a foreign language helps learners engage with authentic language content and develop a better understanding of the rhythm and stress patterns of the target language. Carlsson (2015) also highlights the positive effects of singing karaoke on English pronunciation among Korean EFL learners. They find that karaoke singing contributes to improved pronunciation accuracy, rhythm, and intonation, indicating that karaoke can be a fun and effective way to practice pronunciation skills. Moreover, karaoke singing with lyrics as a context for intensive speaking practice helps improve learners' rhythm and stress patterns which in turn enhances speaking fluency and intelligibility (Chen, 2011). According to Lems (2001), the role of learner autonomy in karaoke-based pronunciation learning is proved because karaoke can serve as a self-directed learning tool, allowing learners to take ownership of their pronunciation practice and progress.

III. Method

3.1. Research Methods

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative phase involved pre-test and post-test assessments to measure students' English pronunciation skills before and after the intervention using karaoke singing, and surveys used to gather students' perceptions, attitudes toward the use of karaoke activities. The qualitative phase was occupied in the interview section to analyze deeply the participants' opinions about the use of karaoke activities for improving English pronunciation.

3.2. Participants

This research was conducted from March 20, 2023, to June 25, 2023, with the participation of 27 students from the English Department during the academic year 2022-2023. The writer selected this group because they were in their second year of study, and as a result, they had not yet taken the phonology course. This approach aimed to minimize bias in the research, as the writer employed a phonological/phonetic approach in administering treatment to the students.

3.3. Data collection

In doing this research, the writer has given the participants treatment in the form of tests (pre-test and post-test), survey questionnaires and interviews. In both tests, students had to read a text given by the writer. Even though the text of the pre-test was different from the text of the post-test, there were some keywords known only by the writer. This was aimed to be the indicator in analyzing the students' pronunciation skill improvement. Survey questionnaires were developed to collect relevant data for the study. The questionnaire contains 3 parts, each part has 3 questions. In more detail, the first three questions (part 1) are used to collect the students' perceptions towards pronunciation. The next three questions (part 2) aim at valuating the effectiveness of karaoke activity in improving students' pronunciation. The last three questions (part3) refer to some major problem's students encountered when they learned English pronunciation by the use of Karaoke. To get deeper information on the use of karaoke in learning pronunciation, the writer also employed interviews in collecting the data. Time for each interview lasted for approximately 10 minutes. The interviews were conducted with 4 students. In the last meeting, following the students' karaoke-based learning experience, a structured interview was conducted. During the interview, the students were asked to respond to questions concerning their thoughts on the method and the challenges they encountered while learning pronunciation through karaoke.

IV. Findings and discussion

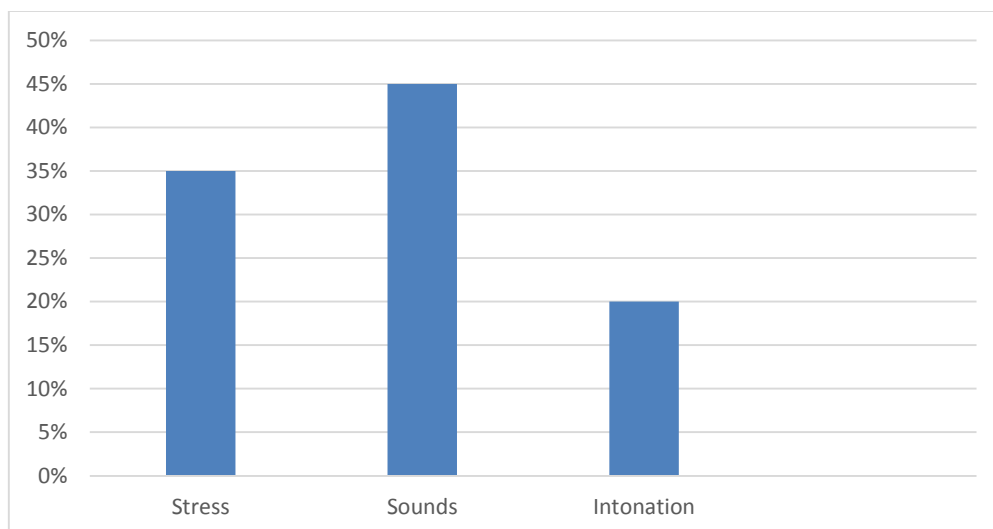
4.1. Findings

Based on data obtained from three distinct instruments, we have organized our findings into two subsections that align with our research objectives. The first subsection explores students' perceptions of English pronunciation, while the second assesses the efficacy of utilizing karaoke intervention to improve learners' pronunciation.

4.1.1. Participants' perceptions toward English pronunciation

The author intended to discover participants' insights toward English pronunciation among a group of English major students by analyzing data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The participants were asked about the role of pronunciation, their confidence in speaking English, challenges faced in pronunciation, and their preferred methods for pronunciation instruction. The majority of participants acknowledged the significance of pronunciation in effective communication. The majority of them (95%) emphasized the significance of clear pronunciation in ensuring effective communication in different social and professional contexts. They also demonstrated a strong link between pronunciation and speaking confidence. Those who felt they had improved their pronunciation reported increased confidence in using English in everyday conversations and during interactions with native speakers. Regarding the difficulty in practicing pronunciation, participants expressed specific challenges in mastering certain sounds, stress patterns, or intonation. Among of them, 45% of participants admitted that identifying the English sounds is the most challenging while speaking English. These data were shown in the chart below:

Figure 1: Students' Response on the Most Difficult Elements of Pronunciation



When being asked about their preference pronunciation models, they showed their variety of choices. They admitted that their pronunciation was influenced by the pronunciation models they were exposed to, including their teachers' accents, native speakers, and media representations. Some participants expressed preferences for specific accents, while others aimed for a more neutral pronunciation.

The findings indicate that participants' perceptions toward English pronunciation are multi-faceted and influenced by various factors. The acknowledgment of pronunciation's importance aligns with existing research that highlights the role of clear pronunciation in successful communication.

The strong connection between pronunciation and speaking confidence suggests that pronunciation improvement can significantly impact learners' overall language proficiency and willingness to engage in oral communication. Thus, pronunciation instruction should be integrated holistically into language courses to boost learners' confidence and motivation.

4.1.2. The Effectiveness of Karaoke Usage in Improving Students' Pronunciation

The analysis of pretest and post-test scores revealed a statistically considerable development in pronunciation skills among the participants. Scores of students' English pronunciation in posttest showed a higher mean improvement in stress, sounds and intonation compared to theirs in the pretest.

The results of both tests are presented below:

Table 1. The Students' Scores of Pre and Post-test

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Pretest	6	7.5	6.5
Posttest	7.0	8.0	7.2

According to the table above, the participants' pronunciation performance improved after undergoing five karaoke activity sessions. The posttest results indicated a mean score of 7.2, with a minimum of 7.0 and a maximum of 8.0. In comparison, the pretest scores showed a mean of 6.5, with a minimum of 6.0 and a maximum of 7.5. This shows that karaoke intervention had a positive impact on the pronunciation skills of all students in the class, leading to noticeable improvements.

Table 2 below will demonstrate the impact of karaoke activities on various aspects of pronunciation, as assessed through the test.

Table 2. The pretest and posttest results of students' pronunciation aspects

Aspects	Average pretest score	Average posttest score	Deviation
Sounds	6.2	7.1	0.9
Stress	6.4	7.4	1.0
Intonation	6.5	7.0	0.5

Concerning the specifics of development, based on test score descriptions in detail, it is evident that the students achieved higher scores in various aspects of pronunciation, including the more challenging elements like sounds. Among the three elements, stress uses (both word stress and sentence stress) showed the most significant improvement, with students' scores increasing by 1 point after engaging in karaoke practice.

Besides, the information gathered from the questionnaires for the students showed a high level of engagement and motivation in using karaoke for pronunciation practice. The majority of participants reported enjoying the karaoke sessions and believed that it positively impacted their pronunciation improvement. When being asked for the deeper insights into their experiences with karaoke-based pronunciation practice, participants expressed that karaoke allowed them to practice pronunciation in a fun and an interactive way, making learning process enjoyable and less intimidating. They also mentioned feeling more confident in their speaking abilities after engaging in karaoke sessions.

4.2. Discussion

The research findings suggest that karaoke usage can be an effective tool in improving students' pronunciation skills in an EFL context. The significant improvement proved in by the post-test scores indicates that karaoke-based pronunciation practice positively impacted learners' sound, stress and intonation. The high level of engagement and motivation reported by participants in the questionnaires aligns with the concept of gamification in language learning. Karaoke adds an element of playfulness and competition to pronunciation practice, making it a more enjoyable and rewarding experience for learners. The positive feedback from participants in the interviews indicates that karaoke provided learners with a low-pressure environment to practice pronunciation. This may have reduced speaking anxiety and allowed learners to focus on improving their pronunciation without fear of judgment.

Karaoke's interactive nature enables learners to mimic native speakers' intonation patterns and stress placement, enhancing their ability to produce more natural-sounding speech. This exposure to authentic pronunciation models through song lyrics contributes to learners' pronunciation accuracy and rhythm development (Chen, 2011). Moreover, Lin (1995) also showed that karaoke offers immediate feedback, as learners can compare their pronunciation with the original song, providing a self-assessment opportunity for learners to monitor their progress. However, it is essential to acknowledge that while karaoke has demonstrated effectiveness in improving pronunciation, it should not be viewed as a stand-alone solution. According to Fraser (2000), traditional pronunciation instruction and other language practice activities should complement karaoke-based practice to ensure a well-rounded approach to pronunciation improvement.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the use of karaoke as a tool to improve students' pronunciation skills in English language learning. The research findings shed light on the effectiveness of karaoke-based pronunciation practice. The pretest and post-test analysis demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in pronunciation among the students that used karaoke for pronunciation practice. Participants reported higher levels of engagement and motivation in using karaoke, emphasizing its positive impact on their confidence in speaking English. However, the study also identified several problems faced by students when using karaoke, including difficulty in selecting appropriate songs, limited personalized feedback, concerns about mimicking native speaker models, and feelings of anxiety and embarrassment during karaoke sessions. To address these challenges, educators can provide pre-selected song lists tailored for pronunciation practice, offer individualized feedback sessions, incorporate songs with various accent models, and foster a supportive learning environment. Overall, the findings underscore the potential of karaoke as an engaging and effective tool for improving pronunciation skills. By implementing the suggested solutions and adapting the approach to meet learners' individual needs, educators can harness the power of karaoke to enhance students' pronunciation proficiency and overall language learning experience.

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