

SUGGESTED MECHANISMS OF MOTIVATION TO STUDY ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION SKILLS FOR NEU STUDENTS

● LE ANH THO - NGUYEN THI THU TRANG - CHU THI KIM NGAN

ABSTRACT:

Pronunciation is seen as a hard skill to absorb to many students, which leads to their demotivation in learning this skill. Pronunciation taught at National Economics University mainly focuses on such practical issues that students often find scared of as sounds, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation. However, at the lowest level of pronunciation, mispronouncing words are common among those learners, not mentioning the higher levels, so it is unavoidable that they can easily lose interests when learning this skill. Arisen from that fact, this research has been done to help provide teachers and learners a set of motivation mechanism to be used as a strong tool and reference in their pronunciation classes.

Keywords: pronunciation, classroom motivation, motivation mechanism.

1. Introduction

In the field of this research in and out of Vietnam, in fact, previous studies primarily focused on theories of English teaching methods, few have been interested in methods of creating class motivation but it is still too general with little actual data. More seriously, there seems not to be a specific study on the mechanism of learning motivation for students in developing English pronunciation skills. Meanwhile, students in general and students of National Economics University (NEU) in particular are said to have poor or incorrect English pronunciation, which leads to their inconfidence when communicating in English or causes some unworthy confusion and misunderstandings. This absolutely affects their social communication capability as well as their future work. Therefore, this research is carried out with the desire to provide students and teachers with a set of motivational mechanisms, from which both sides can be proactive in teaching and learning in pronunciation skills.

2. Objective of the study

Building and perfecting a motivation mechanism

for students so that lecturers can use it in the process of teaching phonetics in particular and English in general to promote and improve students' effectiveness in learning English, especially for freshmen at National Economics University.

3. Research Question

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What motivation mechanisms are the English lecturers of the Faculty of Foreign Languages for Economics - National Economics University using?

2. What is the current status of application and effectiveness of those motivation mechanisms?

3. How to build a synchronous motivation mechanism for teachers to use in teaching pronunciation for first-year students at National Economics University?

4. Objects and Scope of the study

4.1. Objects of the study

Motivation mechanisms in teaching and learning pronunciation used by lecturers and first-year students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages for Economics - National Economics University.

4.2. Scope of the study

English teachers of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Economics and students of the National Economics University who have participated in studying pronunciation, including junior and senior students of both departments in our faculty.

There are two departments, working on different kinds of students at National Economics University. The first one is Department of Business English teaching students who studies business English, and the second one is Department of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes teaching students of Advance English Program (AEP). There are over 40 teachers in total teaching 4 different English skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. However, only some of us teach pronunciation with only two from the Department of Business English and 7 from the other, comprising a total of 9 teachers joining this survey.

The Faculty of Foreign Languages for Economics has two departments. The Department of Business English (BE) teaches its own students, and the Department of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes (SP) trains students of other faculties focusing on the AEP ones. Thus, questions were given to 3 classes taught by the BE, and 3 classes by the SP in an online google form. They came from different intakes with 2 from K60, 2 from K61, 2 from K62.

5. Brief Literature Review

5.1. The importance of teaching English pronunciation

Human beings use language as a means of communication; in other words, to express ideas, communication is used in form of a language every day. However, there is a big problem that struggles so many students who study English, an international language. They are too afraid to speak out in English. Thus, it's very deficient to teach English pronunciation which explains why it has never been completely applied in schools. Obviously, teaching English in a correct way helps us reach fluency and speak naturally in real communication. The correct way mentioned here is pronunciation, which to many students is the hardest part in acquiring English, so they should spend a lot of time to improve it (Aliaga García, 2007; Martínez-Flor et al. 2006; Pourhoseini Gilakjani, 2016).

It is obvious that an indispensable part of communicative competence is understandable pronunciation (Morley 1991). Bearing it in mind, teachers should aim at applicable and obtainable activities that meet the communication needs of learners. Pronunciation instruction, if applicable, can encourage learners' actual production, building their pronunciation awareness and practice.

5.2. The relationship between teaching pronunciation and fostering motivation

Actually, there has never been a study on the relationship between teaching pronunciation and fostering motivation before. As known, pronunciation is a difficult subject for many students, which if they are not patient enough, it's hard to succeed in learning it. Thus, motivation, despite coming from inside or outside themselves, plays indispensable roles. Below are some of the typical obstacles that often trouble students a lot:

Obstacle 1: Assimilation in English sounds.

Obstacle 2: Similar sounds

Obstacle 3: Linking sounds

In these cases, fostering motivation definitely makes students feel it easy to learn and get more involved into the phonetics lessons.

6. Research Method

As an experienced teacher for more than a decade, we would say that a research without its application in classroom and creating its effects on students is not worth doing. By which we mean, the best way to know whether what is researching is workable in real life is to practice it in the class, observing the results that students gain from it. To do this, Classroom Action Research Method (CARM) presents its practicality.

As a highly practical method, the classroom action research undergoes 7 steps of implementation, according to Bell, 1993; Sagor, 2000; and Hubbard and Power, 1993: Step one: Identifying a question or problem => Step two: Reviewing Literature => Step three: Planning a research strategy => Step four: Gathering data => Step five: Making sense of the data => Step six: Taking action => Step seven: Sharing the findings.

7. Research Results

7.1. Results and research analysis from the questionnaires

In this questionnaire, we used some same questions to survey teachers and students on the

teaching and learning pronunciation with 20 given to teachers and 21 given to students. The purpose of this is to see how different their perspectives and expectations are in order to re-design different mechanisms of motivation for both of them. The results are clear on:

1. The viewpoints toward teaching and learning Phonetics among teachers and students: It shows the high evaluation of phonetics in teaching and learning English among both teachers and students.

2. Students' self-learning ability regarding this Phonetics: Most students do not take the initiative in self-learning this phonetics skills, instead, they expect much in teachers' instruction and motivation.

3. The approaches and teaching activities applied in Phonetics lessons: One fixed approach will not work for students of phonetics. To approach them in teaching phonetics, teachers have to be very flexible in using both gentle and pressure approaches.

4. The factors contributing to a motivating Phonetics class, including: students' learning competence, their attitude towards learning Phonetics, their teachers' inspiration, their poor pronunciation, the boring teaching materials (textbooks, supplementary workbook, etc.), teachers' expectation to improve their students' pronunciation, a variety of available English pronunciation materials online and offline, teachers' self-checking their pronunciation during the process of teaching Phonetics to students, and the importance of Phonetics in helping students speak English well.

5. The difficulties or obstacles given in the process of learning Phonetics, including: uncooperative students, differences in students' English level, the too good or too weak English competence of the whole class, the too difficult phonetics knowledge for students, insufficient time allowance for studying phonetics, class condition, students' inactiveness in learning this skill, students' inconfidence, being afraid of making pronunciation mistakes when speaking, students' dialects and accent, limited learning time, consuming time to search extra phonetics materials, teachers' demotivation.

6. Ways to find materials to teach Phonetics: Generally, most of them found it easy to find phonetics materials to support their teaching and

learning though there were not too many. If it was easy to access learning materials and students took the initiative in finding and learning them, a lot of workload would be reduced for the teachers.

7. The need of motivation mechanism

7.2. Results and research analysis from the interviews

Our students from four different classes were chosen randomly. Two of them were from the BE department, and the other two were from the SP one. We gave them the same 21 questions as given above, and the results found were the same as the majority of students in each question. Thus, it would be redundant to make it presented again in this section.

7.3. Results and research analysis from the observation notes at class

As a matter of fact, at the time of doing this action research, it was pandemic time. There were no classes run actually offline and no pronunciation classes opened. However, all the data and teaching notes done in my pronunciation classes intaken by students K60, K61, K62 were saved and kept in the private Facebook groups of those classes created by me previously.

In those classes, we used action research methods all the time by giving activities and assignments, observing how students implemented them, giving evaluation, fixing something off the track, updating new ways to deliver the lessons, interacting closely to each student, and witnessing their improvement over the time.

Students were often asked to fulfilled the assignments before going to class. They have to do a lot of pair work and cross-checking, practicing together and checking mistakes before sitting 1-1 with me at class.

To motivate students to study this skill, we used a variety of class activities as well as some regulations, which was sometimes a bit stressful (but fun), to push students to a new level of pronouncing words, sentences, or intonation. They will all be presented in the next section, partly contributing to a proposal of motivation mechanism to promote studying English phonetics. Proven materials were presented in the Appendix 3 at the end of this research.

The results from applying those motivation methods were amazing. Students loved learning

Phonetics and so their pronunciation skill was improved dramatically. Proven results were shown in the Appendix 4 at the end of this research.

8. Proposals on motivation mechanism

With a lot of obstacles given to both teachers and students in teaching and learning Phonetics, a set of motivation mechanism would be really helpful and supportive. In this chapter, as a practical researcher, we would propose a suggested one which is supposed to be useful for teachers to use in order to motivate their students in learning phonetics and even speaking skill.

Below is the presentation of each motivation mechanism, applying both gentle and pressure approaches.

8.1. Pressure Approach

8.1.1. Motivation mechanism 1: Attendance and participation

Attendance

Students were asked to fully attend the class but it doesn't mean they are eligible to attend the midterm and final test. If they were absent for 20% of the course, they would have to retake the course. To be clear, let's take this example:

If a course lasts for 10 weeks with 2 credits/week studying in one day of the week, to get the full attendance, students have to fully attend all 10 days. If they were absent for two day, they would not be allowed to take the exams.

Participation

Participation means students really join and complete all the class activities. If they did not join the activities given up to a number of times (3-4-5 depending on teachers' decision), they also would not permitted to take the exams. The question is how teachers can follow and check all students in the class while time is short?

The answer is actually very easy: in the logbook of the class, make it two columns: one for attendance, and one for participation. In the attendance column, tick all those who attend the class. In the participation column, just tick on the names who have not accomplished the task. Attendance checking should be done at the beginning of the class, while participation should be check at the end. From my own experience, it takes only 1-2 minutes to do checking each of them, so it is very feasible to apply this way.

Advantages: Students aware of this very well and

fully attend the class, seriously join their class activities.

Disadvantages: Students feel a bit stressed and do not like it at the beginning of the course.

How to handle: Be serious but friendly to students when implementing it.

8.1.2. Motivation Mechanism 2: Homework fulfillment

Due to the short time at class, it is highly advised that teachers should assign students with more exercises to practice at home. Then the first thing to do after checking attendance is to check their homework fulfillment.

If students have not finished it, ask them to go out and finish it within 15-20 minutes, then they can come back to keep learning the lesson. If they cannot, they are still allowed to keep studying but their attendance is marked as absent that day.

Advantages: Students enhance their awareness and skills, improve their phonetics knowledge.

Disadvantages: Sometimes teachers may give a lot of homework which could be a burden for them to fulfill.

How to handle: Be aware of the amount of homework given to students.

8.1.3. Motivation mechanism 3: Peer self-assessment

Peer self-assessment means that students do cross-checking after finishing the homework/assignment/class activities given by teachers. In order to do peer self-assessment, teachers must have a guidance on what to be assessed in detail, written in a clear note to give it to students. When students assess their partners' practice or exercise, they can take it as a measure.

Advantages: This helps build students' independence skill of learning, and saves time and efforts for teachers.

Disadvantages: If the guidance is not clear enough, students may get troubles in cross-checking, which leads to inefficiency of the lesson.

How to handle: Be very well-prepared with the guidance.

8.1.4. Motivation mechanism 4: Mutual responsibility

In fact, when working together in pairs, some students are too weak and some are very good at English pronunciation. Besides, some students are not ready and eager to learn, some are very

interested. To solve this problem, ask them to take responsibility over the other. How to do it? Here is the way.

After they finish doing exercises together, teachers often check at class. When checking, teachers immediately know whether student A and B (a pair) have done it successfully. There should be a simple measure to assess their completion of homework: Pass or Fail.

If the teacher says student A passes and student B fails, both A and B accept that both of them fail this activity. If the teacher says both of them passes, they are marked “done well”. If she says both of them fails, they fail this activity obviously. By this doing, students understand their responsibility over the other, so they absolutely try their best to help their partner.

Advantages: Students learn together and help each other progress well.

Disadvantages: It may take a lot of time of students to get improved as required.

How to handle: Don't deliver so many tasks to students at the same time.

8.1.5. Motivation mechanism 5: Self-assessment and teacher's random check

In a class of several dozens of students, checking 1-1 between teachers and students is impossible in all cases. Thus, it is faster and also effective if teachers ask students to do their self-assessment.

There are so many ways to ask students to do exercises by themselves and then do self-checking, possibly including:

Going live on the private Facebook group of the class

Writing phonetics of the text

Copying the voice

Recording their voice

Self-talking / self-presenting

Advantages: Students become more confident in communication and improve their knowledge of pronunciation a lot.

Disadvantage: Students may be overwhelming.

How to handle: Do not ask them to go live in the first two week but tell them that they will have to do that in the coming time.

8.2. Gentle approach

8.2.1. Motivation mechanism 6: Games

Students are often excited to play games, so

games are absolutely a great way to motivate them. To have ideas on what games to play, teachers can buy books of pronunciation games in which there are so many to apply. In this research, I don't think there is a need to list them all out here.

Advantages: Students get excited and so very motivated to class.

Disadvantages: It may sometimes be very time-consuming and ineffective in improving pronunciation if teachers use them all the time.

How to handle: Teachers should not allow playing phonetics games in all lessons. When applying games, teachers should control the time.

8.2.2. Motivation mechanism 7: Prizes

Students loves prizes. As long as there is a prize presented in advance for those who can finish the activity/assignment/homework given by teachers, they will focus on doing the task at their best.

Advantages: Students are highly motivated and learn it at their best.

Disadvantages: It costs teachers' money in some cases

How to handle: It depends on teachers to apply it often or not.

8.2.3. Motivation mechanism 8: Mock test

Students are always interested in their improvement by scores. Before the midterm test and final exam, teachers should design a mock test that covers all the criteria taught up to the test time. Then teachers also should help them check for the best answers.

Advantages: Students are happy because they feel that they are well-prepared for the tests.

Disadvantages: It takes a lot of teachers' time.

How to handle: Teachers should save the mock tests to make it a bank of tests for further use.

Conclusion

This research was done in the context of the pandemic, so there were a lot of disadvantages during its process. However, with a variety of saved practical materials and questionnaires, it is believed to have done successfully with a clear analysis on some typical aspects related to teaching and learning Phonetics at National Economics University, the need and the how to implement it for NEU freshmen. It is highly proposed that there should be at least some more credits added to students' English programs so that they can perfect their English skills ■

REFERENCES:

1. Adapted from Sadker, M., and Sadker, D.. -"Questioning Skills" in Cooper, J. M., editor. Classroom Teaching Skills: A Handbook.
2. Dinh Tien Minh. Cải cách phương pháp giảng dạy đại học. *Journal of Economics Development*, No.178, August 2005.
3. McNiff, J. (1988) Action research: principles and practice, Basingstoke, Macmillan
4. Corey, Stephen M., (1953) Action research to improve school practices; Bureau of publications, Teachers college, Columbia University, New York.
5. Mills, G.E. (2000). Action Research: A Guide for the teacher researcher. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
6. Hopkins, D. (1985). A Teacher's guide to classroom research. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
7. Burnaford, G., Fischer, J., & Hobson, D. (1996). Teachers doing research: Practical possibilities. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Received date: December 27, 2022

Reviewed date: January 6, 2023

Accepted date: January 15, 2023

Authors:

1. Master. LE ANH THO¹

2. Master. NGUYEN THI THU TRANG¹

3. Master. CHU THI KIM NGÂN¹

¹National Economics University

ĐỀ XUẤT CƠ CHẾ THÚC ĐẨY VIỆC HỌC KỸ NĂNG PHÁT ÂM TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KINH TẾ QUỐC DÂN

● ThS. **LÊ ANH THO¹**

● ThS. **NGUYỄN THỊ THU TRANG¹**

● ThS. **CHU THI KIM NGÂN¹**

¹Trường Đại học Kinh tế quốc dân

TÓM TẮT:

Phát âm chuẩn là một kỹ năng khó đối với đa số sinh viên học tiếng Anh, có thể dẫn đến việc các em mất động lực học môn học này. Phương pháp dạy phát âm tại Trường Đại học Kinh tế quốc dân luôn tập trung vào những kỹ năng phát âm thực tế mà sinh viên nói chung thường cảm thấy sợ hãi như âm tiết, trọng âm của từ, trọng âm của câu, và ngữ điệu. Tuy nhiên, ngay ở cấp độ phát âm thấp nhất, việc phát âm sai vẫn là phổ biến, chưa nói đến cấp độ cao hơn, nên việc sinh viên dễ mất hứng thú khi học kỹ năng này là điều khó tránh khỏi. Xuất phát từ thực tế đó, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm giúp cung cấp cho người dạy và người học một bộ đề xuất cơ chế tạo động lực để sử dụng như một bộ công cụ hữu ích và là tài liệu tham khảo trong các lớp học phát âm hiện nay.

Từ khóa: phát âm, động lực học tập, cơ chế tạo động lực.