



Research Article

AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON TEACHING PRONUNCIATION FOR ADOLESCENTS' LEARNING COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH THROUGH ENGLISH POP SONGS

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the efficacy of utilizing English pop songs to teach liaison (linking sounds) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The experiment, conducted over five weeks, involved two groups of adolescent learners enrolled in a general English course at a university's foreign language department in Ho Chi Minh City. The sample comprised an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 20 students participating in a communicative English course. The experimental materials included five English pop songs, accompanied by Cloze-Test exercises based on the song lyrics. Participants were tasked with identifying correct answers containing connecting sounds while listening to the music. The research design incorporated both pre-test and post-test assessments to measure progress. Data analysis was performed using SPSS Version 26. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' mastery of connected sounds, as evidenced by post-test scores and a p-value below .05. However, the study's limitations include the absence of a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as well as the lack of questionnaires and interviews to provide additional insights.

Keywords: English pop songs; experimental; liaisons; pre-test; post-test

1. Introduction

Teaching English through songs is a widely used technique, yet research on the application of English pop music for pronunciation instruction at universities remains a pertinent issue (Vo, 2015). Current observations reveal that students, particularly non-English majors, frequently commit pronunciation errors, which consequently hampers their listening and speaking skills. The results from the entry-level pronunciation tests conducted in March 2024 for students in English communication classes show scores ranging from 11% to 17%, with approximately 39% of students scoring zero. Besides errors in vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation, the most severe issue lies in the mispronunciation of

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liaisons. This is a significant factor contributing to the limited proficiency in their English communication skills.

Given the aforementioned issues in teaching and learning pronunciation, a more innovative teaching method that aligns with students' current pronunciation learning and practice needs to be proposed. This article aims to introduce a novel solution to address students' pronunciation problems and to provide teachers with an effective and engaging method for teaching pronunciation. The proposed method, titled “Experimental Teaching of Pronunciation for English Communication Learners Using English Pop Songs,” seeks to enhance pronunciation instruction and stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning pronunciation.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

2.1. Literature Review

In the current study, linking sounds are introduced and examined. According to Cook (2013), linking sounds are the sounds produced by the connection between two adjacent sounds, viewed as a linkage formed between the final consonant of one word and the initial vowel of the subsequent word. Brinton (2009) observed that if learners practice linking sounds effectively, they will find it easier to master listening and speaking skills in English.

Furthermore, practical English communication shows that linking sounds are quite appealing but challenging for learners to recognize, even at moderate speaking speeds, and thus warrant focused research. Linking sounds arise from the connection of two adjacent words (e.g., love it /lʌv it/, talk about him /tɔ:k ə'baʊt hɪm/), making sentences smoother and more professional in pronunciation. However, these sounds are inherently difficult. Moreover, linking sounds result in a connected and elided pronunciation that differs from the words' standard phonetic transcriptions. This requires learners to practice extensively and develop a keen ear for these linkages to meet listening and speaking proficiency standards and achieve successful communication.

Regarding the teaching of linking sound pronunciation techniques, Brinton (2009) emphasized the importance of paying attention to subsequent sounds, especially when they converge within sentence phrases. Similarly, according to Murcia and colleagues (1996), the teaching methodology for linking sounds can include having students read sentences and providing cues to focus on pronunciation through four factors: (1) the position of consonants and vowels, (2) the linking sounds (C_V), (3) the reduction of unstressed syllables, and (4) the simplification of consonant clusters.

English pop music is a genre played with electronic instruments and is widely popular (Nambiar, 1993). It typically features short songs with poignant lyrics and simple, memorable melodies. Lamb (2014) also acknowledged that since around 1950, pop music has become one of the most popular music genres. Pop music is characterized by its

melodious and catchy tunes, as seen in songs like "Take Me to Your Heart," "Give a Little Love," "Miss You," "Only Love," and many others.

Teaching pronunciation through English songs has been researched by numerous scholars, who have expressed positive views on this method. Nambiar (1993) argues that pop music motivates young learners because music can evoke emotions and prompt them to sing along, thereby learning pronunciation (p. 336). Additionally, the rhythm of music has a unique potential to energize listeners, making them more attentive and enthusiastic about learning. Moreover, pop music can provide mental relaxation for learners and bring innovation to teaching methods (Vo, 2015). Therefore, pop music has become an effective teaching tool in language classes (Griffiee, 2010). Indeed, many researchers have explored teaching language skills through English songs, such as Lai (2010), Engh (2013), Salcedo (2010), and Tavitl and Isisag (2009). These scholars support using songs as a teaching tool in language classrooms, as music is not only entertaining but also academic, helping learners enjoy and absorb knowledge effectively. Though English language accent has been emphasized as the core background to smooth other language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Connected speech is a crucial aspect of listening and speaking proficiency. While innovative and engaging teaching methods that leverage media to enhance liaison skills show promise, their formal implementation in English language curricula remains under discussion. These approaches have yet to be officially adopted in standard English classrooms, despite their potential positive impact. Moreover, the teaching method for linking sounds using English pop music has not been extensively covered by these scholars or other studies. To help fill this research gap, this article focuses on teaching pronunciation through pop songs, with linking sounds in English chosen as the element for experimentation. The research question is: "To what extent does the use of English pop music to teach linking sounds improve learners' pronunciation skills?"

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Research design

The experiment was conducted over five weeks during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year in an English communication course at a university language center in Ho Chi Minh City. The study sample consisted of two groups, each comprising 20 students enrolled in a three-month pre-intermediate communication course. One group served as the experimental cohort, receiving instruction on linking sounds through English pop songs, while the other as the control group, undergoing traditional pronunciation instruction.

Before the experiment commenced, students from both groups took a pre-test. The pre-test, conducted at the start of the course, aimed to measure and ensure that both groups were at the same level. The structure of the pre-test and post-test was identical, consisting of two parts: Perceptions (25 multiple-choice items) and Production (15 items). The purpose was to

assess learners' proficiency and skills in recognizing and producing English pronunciation at both word and sentence levels. Upon completing the experiment, students from both groups took a post-test, enabling the instructor to gather data, compare results, and identify any differences between the two groups after the experiment.

2.2.2. Research participants

The research sample was randomly selected from two out of five groups, drawn from a total population of 156 learners. Participants were matched for age and pronunciation proficiency based on placement test results and pronunciation assessments conducted by the center. Following the approach outlined by Parkinson and Drislane (2011), the researcher employed a quantitative methodology to collect and analyze experimental data derived from pre-test and post-test results.

2.2.3. Research instruments

The tools for data collection were a pre-test and a post-test. The experimental teaching materials comprised five English pop songs: “*I Can’t Let Go*,” “*Soledad*,” “*My Heart Will Go On*,” “*Betrayal*,” and “*My Love*.”

The teacher-researcher directly designed and experimented with both the experimental and control groups. The experiment was implemented as follows:

Process of Designing Teaching Materials for the Experimental and Control Groups

First, the teacher prepared a separate lesson plan to teach linking sounds using five pop songs for five experimental sessions. The lyrics were printed out and designed with blanks for words or characters containing linking sounds and reductions, following the format of a Cloze test (blanking out entire words). Each Cloze test corresponded to one of the five songs. The selected pop songs were popular and familiar English songs. The songs were arranged in order from very familiar with gentle melodies to less familiar with faster rhythms. Each song had 10 semi-cloze blanks at syllables, characters, or words containing linking sounds, for example: *think___(l) of you (answer: ing)*, *fo___ us to say (answer: r)*. Each student in the experimental group would listen to the song twice during each session, filling in the blanks on the lyrics sheet as they listened. The teacher provided knowledge about linking sounds based on the correct answers to the exercises. Subsequently, the teacher asked students to find additional examples to practice words and phrases containing linking sounds from the lyrics in class. The reason for using examples from the song lyrics was to help students recognize similar linking sounds and ensure the seriousness of the pronunciation experiment using a single resource, English pop music.

For the control group, the pronunciation lesson plan for five weeks was designed based on the textbook “*Solutions (Elementary)*” by Tim Falla, Paul A. Davies, Oxford University Press, 2008. Lessons 1, 3, and 7 were among the five lessons selected for the experiment. The knowledge about linking sounds in these 5 lessons was evenly distributed across 9 sessions, each lasting 25 minutes, as English was a general subject covering all four skills,

and pronunciation knowledge had to be allocated appropriately within a limited time. However, the distribution of pronunciation elements in the textbook and the five lessons was neither even nor comprehensive. This required the teacher to carefully balance and schedule the control group's pronunciation instruction to match the experimental group in terms of time and content. The teaching method used was the conventional approach, with students following the teacher's instructions.

Implementation process

Implementation process for the experimental group:

Step 1: Distribute the song lyrics sheets containing the semi-cloze test to each student.

Step 2: Instruct students on how to complete the semi-cloze test.

Step 3: Play the English pop song for the session twice.

Step 4: Have students listen to the song and simultaneously complete the exercise.

Step 5: Select two students at random to write their answers on the board.

Step 6: Correct the answers and have students pronounce them following the teacher.

Step 7: Teach linking sounds using the words and phrases from the answers.

Step 8: Have students pronounce all the answers again and find additional examples with linking sounds from the song lyrics.

Step 9: Ask students to find and pronounce their examples, correcting their pronunciation as needed.

Step 10: Allow students time to note down and review the pronunciation of all the words and phrases containing linking sounds from the session.

Process of teacher implementation for the control group:

Step 1: Introduce the pronunciation lesson for the session.

Step 2: Write words containing linking sounds and reduced sounds on the board, and read them aloud three times.

Step 3: Ask students to read along with the teacher.

Step 4: Add two or three examples of similar words and read them aloud.

Step 5: Ask students to read independently, and the teacher corrects errors.

Step 6: Have students work in pairs to practice pronouncing the words and phrases learned in single words, phrases, and sentences.

Step 7: Ask students to practice pronouncing the learned words at home.

The data were analyzed using an ANOVA test to compare pronunciation differences between the two student groups before and after the experiment. A p-value (Sig (2-tailed)) greater than 0.05 would indicate no significant difference in pronunciation between pre- and post-experiment. Conversely, a p-value less than 0.05 would suggest a significant difference in linking sound pronunciation proficiency between the two groups following the experiment.

2.3. *Research Ethics*

The study "An experimental study on teaching pronunciation for adolescents' learning communicative English through English pop songs" adheres to rigorous ethical standards. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully apprised of the study's objectives, methodologies, and potential implications before voluntary enrollment. Strict confidentiality protocols are implemented to safeguard participants' personal information. The participant selection process is designed to be equitable, precluding discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, or socioeconomic status. Participants are afforded the right to withdraw from the study at any juncture without incurring penalties or negative consequences. The research design prioritizes beneficence, aiming to maximize potential benefits to participants while minimizing risks of harm. These ethical principles are meticulously observed to ensure the respect, safety, and dignity of all study participants throughout the research process.

3. **Results and Discussions**

3.1. *Research results*

To answer the research question “To what extent does using English pop music to teach liaisons improve students' pronunciation?”, the results of the pre-test and post-test were analyzed and compared to identify differences between the two groups before and after the experiment. This allowed for determining the level of improvement in students' pronunciation skills. The results of the pre-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correct answer rates for linking sounds in the experimental group and control group from the pre-test results

Types of sounds		Liaisons	
Form	Group	Experimental group	Controlled group
	Perceptions	17%	19%
	Production	14%	15%

From Table 1, the correct answer rate for the perception of linking sounds in the experimental group is 17%, compared to 14% in the control group. Regarding the practical application of linking sound pronunciation, the rates are 19% for the experimental group and 15% for the control group. These low percentages indicate a very limited level of proficiency in linking sound pronunciation among students in both groups. Most students struggle with listening to and speaking English because they cannot recognize and pronounce linking sounds. The percentage rates for both groups are nearly indistinguishable and fall below 25%, suggesting that the level of linking sound pronunciation proficiency is equally poor in both groups. The comparison of pre-test results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of pre-test results on liaisons between the control group and the experimental group

N = 20		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Comparison of perceptions on liaisons in pre-test	Equal variances assumed	1.312	.261	.303	54.543	.617	.10000	.31432	-.53002	.73001
	Equal variances not assumed			.303	54.212	.617	.10000	.31432	-.53002	.73002

The Sig (2-tailed) value in Table 2 is 0.617, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in pronunciation skills and proficiency between the two groups as indicated by the pre-test. This result meets the initial research conditions with equivalent pronunciation levels among the students, ensuring objectivity in the study. The results of the final test (post-test) are presented as follows. The post-test results and their comparison were drawn in Table 3 and Table 4 as follows.

Table 3. Comparison of correct answers on liaisons between the experimental group and the control group from the results of the post-test

Types of sounds		Liaisons	
Form	Group	Experimental group	Controlled group
Perceptions		43%	25%
Production		28%	20%

Table 4. Comparison of results from the final course test (post-test) on liaisons between the control group and the experimental group

N = 20		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Comparison of perceptions on liaisons in post-test	Equal variances assumed	1.029	.271	-4.621	55	.000	-.82117	.16112	-1.21800	-.50203
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.621	54.509	.000	-.82117	.16112	-1.21802	-.50201

A marked disparity in the percentage of correct responses for both perception and production of linking sounds is evident between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group demonstrated superior performance, achieving 43% accuracy in perception and 28% in production. In contrast, the control group attained only 25% accuracy in perception and 20% in production. While the control group's production scores represent an improvement from their pre-test results of 6% and 5% respectively, the gains are modest in comparison to the experimental group. Analysis of pre-test and post-test data reveals substantial progress in the experimental group. Specifically, this cohort exhibited a 26 percentage point increase in perception and a 14 percentage point increase in the production of linking sounds. These improvements translate to a rise from 17% to 43% in perception and from 14% to 28% in production. Although these post-intervention percentages may not be considered high in absolute terms, they represent an approximate 50% increase relative to the initial results. This significant performance improvement strongly suggests that the experimental group's pronunciation skills, particularly in the domain of linking sounds, have been markedly enhanced through the use of pop music. The magnitude of this improvement underscores the potential efficacy of this innovative pedagogical approach in fostering pronunciation skills among learners. However, pronunciation of linking sounds remains a challenge for the control group, as there was minimal improvement in both perception and production compared to their pre-test results.

3.2. Discussions

The results indicate that the textbook-based pronunciation teaching did not significantly alter the pronunciation of linking sounds in English. The p-value in Table 4 is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, along with the results from the final test confirming the outcomes after the experiment. The experimental group showed significant progress in knowledge and proficiency in linking sounds. It can be concluded that teaching linking sounds through pop music is beneficial and effective for learners.

The findings once again build on the work of scholars such as Engh (2013), Saledo (2010), Vo (2015), Vo (2023), and Truong (2024) to demonstrate that teaching English pronunciation through songs is an effective teaching technique. Particularly, this study provides positive results regarding the method of teaching linking sounds in English through English pop songs, an area less explored by the aforementioned scholars and others worldwide. The article synthesized clear theoretical foundations and designed an appropriate experiment to ensure scientific value and practical utility for future reference in related research. The method of teaching linking sounds through English pop songs is highly useful, which English teachers can apply in teaching general English skills, especially listening and speaking skills.

4. Conclusion

Overall, under the influence of the experiment of teaching English pronunciation through English pop songs, the pronunciation of linking sounds by students in the experimental group has significantly improved both in terms of perception and practical pronunciation. Many of the linking sounds that students struggled with have been notably addressed. The research question has been answered, and the study's results affirm the effectiveness of using English pop songs. Improving pronunciation in linking sounds is crucial for enhancing students' listening and speaking skills. This research presents a novel pedagogical approach for English language instructors to implement in the teaching of pronunciation, listening, and speaking skills across diverse age groups. The findings demonstrate the importance of employing creative and adaptable methodologies in language instruction, particularly in the domain of pronunciation. Such innovative approaches are crucial for fostering learner engagement and cultivating intrinsic motivation for language acquisition. Moreover, the study advocates for an increased integration of audiovisual aids in pronunciation instruction. Specifically, it recommends the incorporation of multimedia resources such as music, video clips, films, and theatrical performances. This multimodal approach aims to provide learners with a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of pronunciation features while simultaneously enhancing their motivation to engage with the learning material.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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THỰC NGHIỆM DẠY HỌC PHÁT ÂM CHO NGƯỜI HỌC TIẾNG ANH GIAO TIẾP BẰNG CÁC BÀI NHẠC POP TIẾNG ANH

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết này mô tả quá trình thực nghiệm dạy phát âm, cụ thể là về âm nối, qua các bài nhạc pop tiếng Anh trong khoảng thời gian năm (5) tuần, với sự tham gia của hai nhóm sinh viên trong các khóa học tiếng Anh giao tiếp: một nhóm thực nghiệm và một nhóm đối chứng. Mỗi nhóm bao gồm 20 sinh viên đang theo học tại Trung tâm Ngoại ngữ của một trường đại học tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Tư liệu thực nghiệm bao gồm 5 bài nhạc pop tiếng Anh cùng các bài kiểm tra dạng semi-cloze test tại các âm nối được thiết kế trên lời bài hát. Sinh viên vừa nghe nhạc vừa hoàn thành bài tập. Phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu từ các bài kiểm tra trước và sau khi thực nghiệm, việc phân tích dữ liệu được thực hiện bằng các thuật toán của SPSS phiên bản 26. Kết quả thực nghiệm cho thấy có sự cải thiện trong phát âm âm nối của sinh viên, được minh chứng qua điểm số tại bài kiểm tra post-test và giá trị p của SPSS nhỏ hơn .05. Tuy nhiên, nghiên cứu này còn hạn chế bởi sự thiếu vắng của phương pháp hỗn hợp kết hợp giữa phương pháp định tính và định lượng, cũng như việc thu thập dữ liệu qua bảng hỏi và phỏng vấn chưa được triển khai.

Từ khóa: nhạc pop tiếng Anh; thực nghiệm; âm nối; pre-test; post-test