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## Using games to improve pronunciation of the second year non-english major students at Hanoi university of Business and technology

*(Использование игр по улучшению произношения студентов второго курса  
в Ханойском университете бизнеса и технологии)*

**Abstract:** Vietnamese students do not pay much attention to studying pronunciation because they are mostly restricted to the routine of listening and repeating. As a result, pronunciation lessons become a tedious experience for them. The present study aims at three aims. Firstly, the study is to explore the students' attitudes toward using games as a way of improving English pronunciation and raise the students' awareness of features of pronunciation. Secondly, the study is to figure out the teachers and students' challenges in using pronunciation games. Thirdly, the study is aimed at checking how much effectiveness the chosen games in improving the students' pronunciation. Pronunciation pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires, interviews, peer observation, research diary and video recording have been employed to collect data during 8 weeks of the experiment. Results show that games activities have positive effects on improving students' pronunciation in terms of language quality and language production, and the students express positive opinions towards the application of this technique. The findings from this study are directly beneficial to other researchers who aim at enhancing the learners' English pronunciation as well as developing a suitable syllabus for pronunciation lessons at HUBT.

**Keywords:** Games; pronunciation; motivation; English; challenges; application; syllabus; positive effects.

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Correct pronunciation is a basis for efficient communication in English. However, at Ha Noi University of Business and Technology (HUBT), it is very difficult for the second-year non-major students to pronounce English effectively. The researcher believes that there are some reasons for students' English pronunciation weaknesses and the most important reason is that students lack motivation in pronunciation lessons. When teaching pronunciation, the researcher found that students show little or no interest in pronunciation lessons. As a result, there is a lack of opportunities for the students to practise pronunciation. When being asked, many students said that they wanted to practise pronunciation with more interesting methods and teaching aids from the teachers so that they could be motivated to join in English pronunciation lessons.

From teaching experience of the researcher and other teachers of English, the students' lack of motivation is believed to be a very important factor that causes weaknesses of English speaking skills of the second-year non-major English students at HUBT. Considerable work has also shown that motivation and positive are closely related to the success of the students in the second language learning<sup>1</sup>. With the use of games, the teacher can create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions<sup>2</sup>. Mora & Lopera (2001)<sup>3</sup> stated that "games and fun activities have always been one of everybody's favorite things to do in a class, both for teachers and students".

In recent years, within the language learning field, a lot of attention has been given to the application of pronunciation activities in language teaching and learning. Carolyn Aufderhaar (2004)<sup>4</sup> put the focus of the study on using authentic aural text to contextualize teaching pronunciation. Therefore, Aufderhaar used poetry, radio theater, and short stories to supplement a pronunciation course curriculum. Yangklang (2006)<sup>5</sup> conducted a study in improving English final, pronunciation through the Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) program. Annu Paganus co-author (2006)<sup>6</sup> utilized the Vowel Game which an application using vowel charts in order to help the user train to pronounce vowels. The vowel game used visualization method that symbolizes the vocal tract.

In Vietnamese context, Luu Trong Tuan (2010)<sup>7</sup> made proper uses of three application softwares for learning English pronunciation: Pronunciation Power 1, Pronunciation Power 2 and Lose Your Accent in 28 Days (LYA28). These selected applications were very useful for teaching aspects of pronunciation and which made the study trustworthy. In this study, minimal pairs were selected as a means to solve pronunciation problems facing the first-year students in acquiring English discrete sounds basically at word level.

Reviewing those above previous researches, the researcher finds that all those studies above share the same conclusion that the greatest benefits of games is to motivate students in pronunciation activities. Games can help make a significant progress in students' pronunciation if they are used scientifically and effectively.

<sup>1</sup> Lightbown.M.P & Spada, N(Eds). How languages are learnt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Wright A., Betteridge D., & Buckby M. Games for language learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Mora R.A., Lopera M.C. Games in the classroom: More than just having fun. HOW, A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English №8, 2001, pp.75-82.

<sup>4</sup> Aufderhaar C. Learner Views of Using Authentic Audio to Aid Pronunciation: You Can Just Grab Some Feelings// TESOL Quarterly, 38(4), 2004, pp.735-746.

<sup>5</sup> Yangklang W. Improving English final//Pronunciation of Thai students through computer-assisted instruction program master of English Language Studies Suranaree University of Technology, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Paganus, A., Mikkonen, V.-P., Mäntylä, T., Nuutila, S., Isoaho, J., Aaltonen, O., & Salakoski, T. The Vowel Game: Continuous Real-Time Visualization for Pronunciation Learning with Vowel Charts// FinTAL, 2006, pp.696-703.

<sup>7</sup> Tuan L.T. Teaching English Discrete Sounds through Minimal Pairs Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 1(5), 2010, pp.540-561

**Research questions.** The following research questions guide the present study:

- What are the students' attitudes towards using games as a way of improving English pronunciation?
- What are the challenges for using games in English pronunciation lessons?

**Methodology.** In conducting the present study, the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was adopted. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998)<sup>8</sup>, the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches is considered mixed methods. In addition, Creswell (2005)<sup>9</sup> emphasized a mixed method research as a research in which the researcher uses the qualitative paradigm for one phase of a research study and the quantitative research paradigm for another in order to understand a research problem more completely.

Mixed method can provide a deep understanding of research problem for the researcher. Mixed methods enable the researcher to be free in using all methods to deal with a research problem. Also, it does assist the researcher to address problems in numerical and wording forms, combine inductive and deductive thinking, and employ skills in observing people as well as recording behaviors.

Because of these above-mentioned advantages of mixed methods, I decided to choose mixed method to conduct the research on teaching English pronunciation through games.

- *Participants:* The population of the study consists of 2 teachers of English, 2 native English teachers from English department and 30 second-year students of Accounting aged from 19 to 20. The students are studying English as a foreign language and a compulsory subject of the course and most of their English proficiency is at the elementary level.
- *Data collection instruments:* In order to get necessary information for the study, the researcher used some following instruments:

1) Questionnaire: Cárdenas (2006)<sup>10</sup> stated that questionnaires can be used to elicit many different kinds of data. I used questionnaires to inquire into people's knowledge, opinions, ideas and experiences. For that reason, I thought questionnaire was a useful instrument for collecting data.

2) Interview: Interview is one of effective ways to collect qualitative information. According to Kvale (1996)<sup>11</sup>, the major task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. This method allows the participants to explain what is important and necessary. Moreover, it not only brings flexibility to the researcher but also helps him or her to ensure questions are understood and explored. However, the interviewees don't always talk truthfully and this method is quite time-consuming in doing and analysis. In addition, this method is more dependent on attitudes and personality of interviewer.

3) Peer observation: Observation is to help teachers recognize their strong and weak points in teaching English pronunciation through games. Peer observation plays an important and useful role in the process of gathering data within an action research cycle. It is very useful to make an evaluation of your teaching but it is not very feasible while you are in the process of teaching the class.

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<sup>8</sup> Tashakkori A, Teddlie C. Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research. Thousand Oaks, CA: sage, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Creswell J.W. Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Cárdenas, M. L. Uses of interviews and questionnaires [Handout]. Classroom research and innovation. PFPD "Red PROFILE". Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Mimeo, August 12, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Kvale, Steinar. Interviews An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, Sage Publications, 1996.

4) Research diary: In this study, writing research diary was employed to help the teacher to note down the difficulties that he and his students had when using games in pronunciation lessons.

5) Video recording: Recording was carried out at two pronunciation tests and at the students' interview. Recording at two pronunciation tests helped the teacher of English and two native English teachers to analyze the student's English pronunciation exactly.

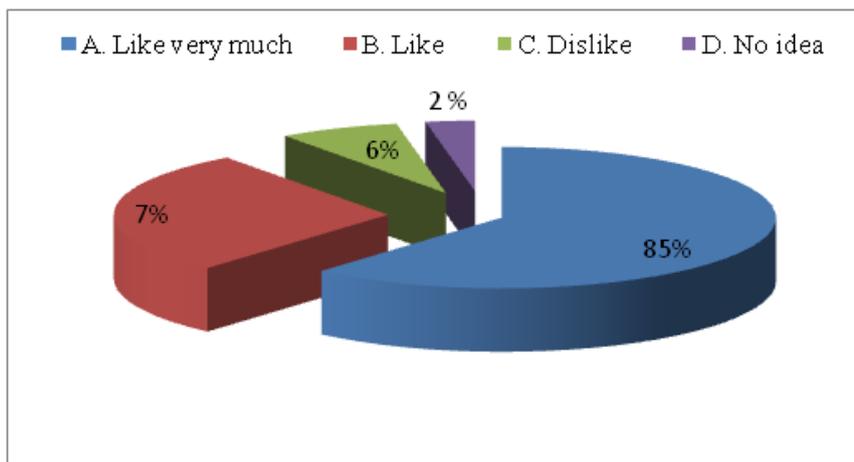
**Result of the study.** After collecting data from pre/post-test, questionnaire, interview, peer observation and video recording, some findings and results that were useful for teaching and learning pronunciation are summarized and presented in three themes:

1) Student's attitudes. Results from questionnaires:

- *Question 1. Did you find learning pronunciation through games interesting? Why/ Why not?.* The majority of students (85%) agreed it was interesting and effective to learn pronunciation through than the traditional way that they were usually exposed to. Some other students (15%) said that they felt more confident to improve their speaking skills as well as communicate with their friends by pronunciation games. This is also shared by Yangklang (2006)<sup>12</sup>: "Many students said that they felt more confident in pronouncing, sound since they had a lot of opportunities to practice their pronunciation".

*Question 2. Did you like pronunciation games given by your teacher during pronunciation lessons? Please circle the item which shows your opinion.*

- a) I liked them very much      b) Yes, they were OK  
 c) I didn't like them at all      d) I had no idea



**Graphic 1.** The students' attitudes towards pronunciation games

Overall, Most of the students showed pleasant feelings and positive attitudes towards learning pronunciation through games. Almost all of the students (85%) picked up choice "a" because they liked the funny atmosphere, the competitiveness and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. There were a small number of students choosing "b" and "c" with 7% and 6% respectively. The percentage of students choosing "d" was very low (2%).

<sup>12</sup> See also Yangklang (2006).

*Question 3. If possible, please put a tick against the games that you liked in your pronunciation lesson.*

**Table 1**

**Students' opinions about the game that they like in their pronunciation lesson**

Teacher's games	Yes (✓)	Computer games	Yes (✓)
Bingo		Hear it/ Find it	
Noughts and Crosses		Phonics game	
Chinese chequers		Theme game	
Phonetic crossword		See it/ Say it	

Through the data collection, it can be said that a lot of students liked teacher's games more than computer games. Most of students (65%) liked games produced by the teacher such as: Bingo, Noughts and Crosses, Phonetic crossword, and Chinese chequers. Some other students (35%) liked computer games from Pronunciation Power I such as: Hear it/ Find it, Phonics game, Theme game, See it/ Say it.

**Table 2**

**The percentage of students and their favor towards computer games and teachers' games**

Games	Students	Percentage
Computer games	10	33.3%
Teacher's games	20	67.3%

*Question 4. If the use of games in teaching English pronunciation is ineffective and boring, what do you think are reasons? (Put a tick ✓)*

- Unclear explanation of the rule of games
- Unsuitable games for the students' level
- Lack of time for the games
- Lack of cooperation with the other students
- Others, please specify

Unclear explanations of the rule of games and unsuitable games for the students' level were two main reasons that made the use of games in teaching English pronunciation become less interesting and effective. Most of the students (74 %) agreed that the use of games in teaching pronunciation is ineffective and boring if the teacher did not explain instructions of playing game clearly. Some other students (26 %) stated that if the level of game was not considered seriously, the success of game would be failed.

*Question 5. To make the use of games in teaching English pronunciation more effective and interesting, what do you think the teacher should do? (Put a tick ✓)*

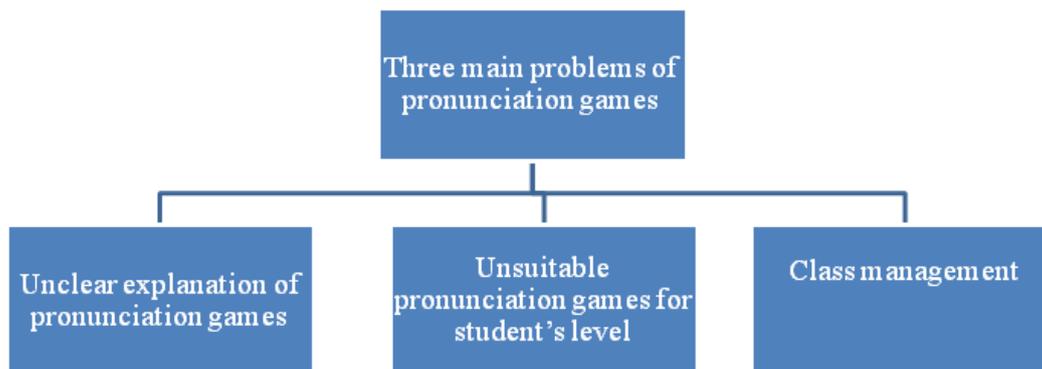
- Explain the rule of games clearly
- Choose an appropriate game for the students' proficiency

- Manage the class better
- Others, please specify

It can be said that there were three main factors that decided the success of using games in teaching English pronunciation. Almost all of the students (86%) said that to make the use of games in teaching English pronunciation, the teacher should explain the rule of games clearly. Moreover, some others students (10%) emphasized that the pronunciation game should be selected suitably for their level and reach the goal of pronunciation lesson. In addition, a few students (4%) said that the teacher should manage the class much more. Otherwise, the class would be very noisy as a real market.

## 2) Teacher's challenges and student's difficulties

**Teacher's challenges.** The data of teacher's difficulties were collected from Peer Observation and Research Diary. Based on the data of Peer Observation of teacher's challenges for using games in the pronunciation lesson, the observers informed me that most of student liked pronunciation games. They were interested in my games more than computer games. However, I failed to make the rules of the games clear as much as it could be. Thus, some of the students did not keep up with the games. Moreover, I paid too much attention to the front and the middle of the class. I skipped the students sitting in the corners at the back of the class. I did not control the class well so the class was noisy. The observers said that the students used the mother tongue instead of English when they discussed with each other. In addition, some students were lack of cooperative attitudes with other members in the group. They remained inactive during the activity. Because of these, to some extent, the success of game was affected. When analyzing the Research Diary, the information was categorized into three items as follows:



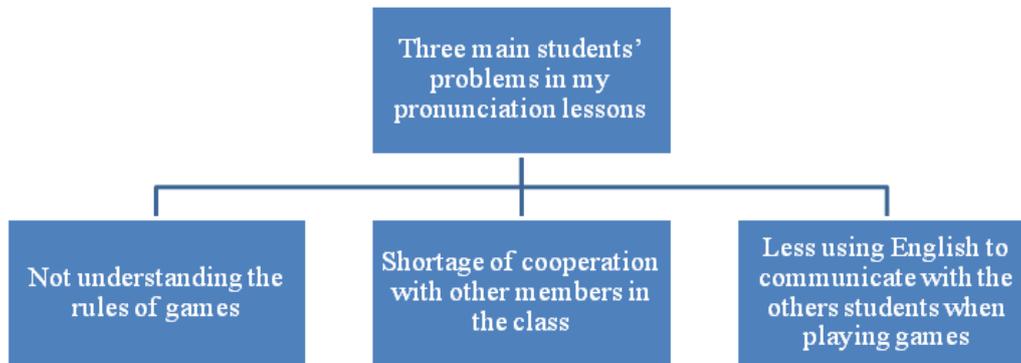
*Graphic 2. Three main problems of pronunciation games*

Firstly, in terms of the game instructions, I realized that the success of the games greatly depends on the teachers' explanation about the rules of games. When I could not make the rules of games clear to the students, they kept asking me about it again and again. It took quite a lot of time of the activity. Besides, the students could not do the activity as it was targeted when they did not understand the playing rules clearly. Sometimes, I had to use mother tongue to explain to the students. Sometimes, students felt embarrassed and confused when they did not understand my instructions for games.

Secondly, regarding the choice for games, I should have modified the games I chose more carefully so that it would be more suitable for my students' level. When the level of the game was beyond the students' level, the game did not work to the most effective extent. The game should not be too easy or too difficult.

Finally, with reference to class management, because of the class size, it was a problem for me to manage the class well from the beginning to the end of the activity. The students were possibly so eager to play the games that they did not follow my command to stop the activity or keep silent to answer the games' questions for instances.

**Student's difficulties.** The student's difficulties for using games in pronunciation lessons were most revealed through the data collected from Interview. First of all, a few students had difficulties when they played pronunciation games. 4 out of 30 students did not understand the instruction or rule of games before playing pronunciation games. Some other students (3 out of 30) met several problems when they played pronunciation games from computer.



**Graphic 3.** Three main students' problems in the pronunciation games

Secondly, when students didn't understand the rules or instructions, they tended to use Vietnamese to ask their classmates to explain but if they still did not understand, they would ask the teacher. However, they usually avoided asking the teacher because they felt shy and unconfident.

**3) Student's improvements**

It can be said that pronunciation games has brought many advantages to my class. When playing the games, my students felt relaxed and they were eager to learn pronunciation and take part in the activities in the class. Because of these, their pronunciation was improved positively.

Table 3 shows the information about the difference in the students' performance between their pre-test and post-test results.

**Table 3**

**Overall calculation of leaners' scores**

Group	Pretest		Post test		Students' improvement	
	Number of student	Percent	Number of student	Percent	Number of student	Percent
G1	11	36.7%	02	6.7%	09	30%
G2	16	53.3%	08	26.7%	08	26.6%
G3	03	10%	16	53.3%	13	43.3%
G4	00	0.0%	04	13.3%	04	13.3%

Group 1 (G1): Bad students

Group 2 (G2): Average students

Group 3 (G3): Good students

Group 4 (G4): Excellent student.

As can be seen from table 3, the students' English pronunciation would be improved dramatically after using pronunciation games. Especially, there was a significant increase in the number of G1 and G3 (30% and 43.3% respectively). The number of students in G2 reduced by a half (26.6%). Moreover, there was appearance of G4 (13.3%) which presented as a confirmation of the depth and width of the students' progress in English pronunciation.

**Conclusion and Suggestions.** Based on the data collected from the pronunciation pretest scores, post-test, questionnaires, observation, video recording, it can be concluded that games have a positive effects on increasing in the students' motivation to pronounce and improving their pronunciation. After the 2 month course working with games, the second-year non-English major students of HUBT show their interest in the technique, which was quite unfamiliar to them in daily class room interaction. Actually, game has been newly implemented for students and the technique has gained a great deal of favor among those students.

As regards the English teaching context at HUBT, some principles of using games in teaching pronunciation should be paid attention. Furthermore, it is expected that the present study will provide a basis for further attempts to design a suitable oral syllabus and more effective techniques for teaching pronunciation to students in HUBT. The discussion of the results also indicates that the teachers at HUBT should think about the choice of oral activities with more suitable games to motivate students to pronounce English correctly in the classroom.

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