THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGLISH SONGS IN ENHANCING LINKING SOUNDS FOR EFL STUDENTS AT BACH KHOA SAI GON COLLEGE

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Abstract: *Linking sounds, crucial features of connected speech, pose significant challenges to Vietnamese English learners due to the phonological disparities between Vietnamese and English. This quasi-experimental study investigates the use of English songs in teaching linking sounds to Vietnamese EFL learners at Bach Khoa Sai Gon College. Participants included a treatment group receiving instruction through English songs and a control group undergoing traditional pronunciation instruction. Quantitative data from pretests and posttests, supplemented by learners' perception questionnaire, revealed statistically significant improvements in the ability to recognize and produce linking sounds in the experimental group. The study highlights the pedagogical value of incorporating music into the teaching of pronunciation and provides implications for future research and classroom practices.*

Keywords: *linking sounds, English songs, pronunciation teaching, quasi-experimental study, EFL learners*

1. INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation, particularly features of connected speech like linking sounds, remains a persistent challenge for Vietnamese EFL learners. While traditional instruction in Vietnam has emphasized grammar and vocabulary, suprasegmental aspects of speech such as linking, elision, and assimilation have been largely overlooked (Nguyen & Ingram, 2006; Dang, 2017). Such neglect led to unnatural speech patterns that often hinder fluency and intelligibility. Vietnamese is a syllable-timed language, whereas English is stress-timed, leading to difficulties in grasping rhythm and linking in spoken English (Roach, 2009). Consequently, many Vietnamese learners struggle to produce and recognize connected speech, impacting their listening comprehension and spoken fluency (Nguyen Quang Ngoan & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Dung, 2017).

Songs, through rhythm and melody, provide authentic and engaging linguistic input, naturally embedding connected speech features (Murphey, 1992; Lems, 2001) and offer an accessible platform for improving students' phonological awareness. The repetitive nature of song lyrics helps learners internalize linking patterns, fostering automaticity in speech (Medina, 1993; Gilbert, 2008). Furthermore, research highlights that songs create a low-anxiety learning environment, enhancing motivation and engagement (Krashen, 1982; Lems, 2001).

This quasi-experimental study investigates the effectiveness of English songs in enhancing the production and perception of linking sounds at Bach Khoa Sai Gon College using pretest and posttest and learners' perception questionnaire to assess the outcomes. It aims to provide empirical evidence for the integration of songs into pronunciation instruction, addressing a gap in current EFL pedagogical practice in Vietnam. Findings from this

study can contribute to a broader discussion on improving pronunciation teaching methodologies, particularly for Vietnamese learners facing challenges in connected speech features. This study addresses the following research questions:

(1) How effectively do English songs impact Vietnamese EFL students' linking sounds at Bach Khoa Saigon College?

(2) What are EFL learners' attitudes toward using English songs to teach linking sounds?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Linking Sounds in English

Linking sounds, such as catenation and intrusion, are essential for natural and fluent speech (Roach, 2009). Vietnamese learners often struggle with these features due to structural differences in the two languages' phonological systems (Nguyen Quang Ngoan & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Dung, 2017). Unlike English, Vietnamese does not exhibit extensive use of linking sounds, making their acquisition challenging for learners. Studies indicate that EFL learners who fail to master linking sounds often experience difficulties in listening comprehension and oral fluency, as they cannot recognize or produce the connected speech forms common in natural conversation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Field, 2008).

In addition, research suggests that explicit instruction in connected speech features can enhance learners' spoken proficiency and listening accuracy (Brown, 2014; Nguyen & Newton, 2020). For instance, Nguyen and Newton (2020) found that explicit training in connected speech improved Vietnamese EFL learners' ability to perceive and produce linking sounds, supporting the argument for integrating such instruction into language curricula. However, many traditional pronunciation teaching methods in Vietnam still emphasize individual phonemes rather than suprasegmental aspects (Tran, 2020). This pedagogical gap points to the need for innovative teaching approaches, such as using songs, to reinforce learners' exposure to authentic connected speech.

2.2 Using Songs in teaching English pronunciation

Songs improve phonological awareness, facilitate long-term memory retention, and increase learner motivation (Lems, 2001; Medina, 1993). Musical rhythm aligns with English's stress-timed nature, making it easier for learners to grasp prosodic features like linking sounds (Gilbert, 2008). Additionally, songs lower learners' affective filters, fostering a relaxed environment for pronunciation practice (Krashen, 1982). Research has demonstrated that integrating songs into EFL instruction enhances learners' engagement and provides a meaningful context for acquiring pronunciation skills (Mora, 2000; Murphey, 1992).

Furthermore, studies have shown that songs improve auditory discrimination, helping learners recognize phonological patterns more effectively (Medina, 1993; Rengifo, 2009). The repetitive nature of lyrics reinforces linguistic structures, aiding in retention and application. Songs also provide exposure to various accents and speech styles, offering a diverse range of authentic input that supports pronunciation development (Mora, 2000). In the Vietnamese EFL context, where learners often receive limited exposure to natural spoken English, incorporating songs into pronunciation instruction presents a viable strategy for enhancing learning outcomes (Nguyen & Newton, 2020).

2.3 Songs and Linking Sounds

Studies suggest that musical input reinforces the perception of connected speech features. English songs naturally

incorporate linking, making them ideal for teaching phonological phenomena (Jenkins, 2010). For example, research by Rengifo (2009) found that songs improved learners' ability to recognize and produce connected speech elements, leading to greater fluency. Additionally, Murphey (1992) highlighted that the melodic and rhythmic elements of songs enhance learners' ability to internalize phonological patterns, making pronunciation practice more engaging and effective.

This section explores the pedagogical integration of linking sounds in English pronunciation instruction, particularly for Vietnamese EFL learners. It begins by discussing key features of connected speech, including catenation and intrusion, as grounded in phonological theory (Roach, 2009), and their implications for listening and speaking fluency (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Field, 2008). Building on communicative language teaching and Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, the section then reviews the use of songs as an engaging tool to enhance phonological awareness, improve auditory discrimination, and reinforce suprasegmental features such as linking sounds (Lems, 2001; Gilbert, 2008; Rengifo, 2009). Previous research supports the benefits of explicit instruction (Nguyen & Newton, 2020), yet few studies specifically address linking sounds in the Vietnamese context. This study addresses this gap by investigating how music-based instruction can foster learners' recognition and production of linking sounds, contributing to more effective pronunciation teaching methodologies in EFL classrooms.

Despite the positive results from general pronunciation training, few studies have focused specifically on linking sounds, particularly in the Vietnamese context (Nguyen & Newton, 2020). Given the phonological differences between English and Vietnamese, further research is needed to explore how musical instruction can bridge these gaps. This study aims to fill that void by examining the impact of using songs to teach linking sounds, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective pronunciation pedagogy for Vietnamese EFL learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest assessments was used. The study involved two intact classes: one experimental group receiving instruction through English songs and one control group using traditional pronunciation methods.

3.2 Participants

A total of 59 first-year EFL students at Bach Khoa Sai Gon College participated: 29 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. All students were of intermediate proficiency and had no prior formal training in connected speech.

3.3 Instructional Intervention

In five weeks, the experimental group received five 50-minute lessons using songs such as Shape of You, Rolling in the Deep, Proud of You, That's Love, and Counting Stars, selected for designing linking sounds practice activities because they contain a rich variety of useful linking features that are suitable for both teaching and student practice. Their melodious and emotionally engaging nature makes them especially effective for facilitating pronunciation learning. Activities included listening, lyric gap-filling, shadowing, and pronunciation drills focusing on consonant-to-vowel linking. In particular, the listening tasks involved multiple exposure phases, where students first listened to the songs without lyrics, then with the lyrics, and finally participated in guided discussions to

analyze phonetic patterns. Lyric gap-filling tasks were designed to help learners develop auditory discrimination skills. Shadowing exercises required students to repeat song lyrics immediately after hearing them, reinforcing fluency and natural prosodic features. Pronunciation drills emphasized specific linking sound rules, encouraging learners to practice through both guided and spontaneous speech exercises. The control group received equivalent time in traditional instruction, emphasizing textbook-based phonetics and repetition drills. Their lessons focused on explicit rule explanations and isolated practice of phonetic elements. Drills primarily consisted of listening to and repeating individual words and phrases, with minimal contextual or musical integration. Unlike the experimental group, they did not engage in interactive or song-based activities.

3.4 Instruments

Pretest and Posttest

Each test contained 20 multiple-choice and five short-answer questions assessing the recognition and production of linking sounds. The multiple-choice section required students to identify correct instances of linking sounds within provided sentence contexts, while the short-answer questions evaluated students' ability to transcribe and explain phonetic transitions. The pretest was administered before the intervention to establish baseline proficiency levels, while the posttest assessed improvements. Both tests were designed to ensure reliability and validity by aligning with phonetic assessment standards. In addition, inter-rater reliability was established through multiple evaluators scoring the production-based responses. The difficulty level and content of the tests were piloted with a small sample group before implementation to ensure clarity and appropriateness for the target participants.

Questionnaire

A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire assessed students' attitudes toward learning linking sounds through songs. The items covered aspects such as perceived effectiveness, engagement, motivation, and confidence in applying linking sounds in speech. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was administered post-intervention to evaluate students' overall perception of the teaching approach. To ensure internal consistency, the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The responses provided valuable data regarding learner preferences and engagement levels, contributing to a broader understanding of affective factors in pronunciation learning.

3.5 Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data. Paired and independent samples t-tests measured differences within and between groups. The paired t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant improvements within each group from pretest to posttest. The independent samples t-test compared the mean scores of the experimental and control groups to assess the effectiveness of song-based instruction versus traditional methods. Descriptive statistics and standard deviations were computed for questionnaire responses to summarize trends in student perceptions. Additionally, effect size calculations were included to determine the practical significance of the observed differences. For qualitative questionnaire responses, thematic analysis was employed to categorize recurring themes, allowing for more details about students' experiences and attitudes toward the intervention. Data visualization techniques such as bar charts and histograms were used to present findings clearly and concisely.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Pretest Results

Both groups performed at similar levels before the intervention, ensuring that any differences observed in the posttest results could be attributed to the instructional method rather than pre-existing disparities. The experimental group had a mean score of 2.52 (SD = 0.85), while the control group scored slightly higher at 2.76 (SD = 1.03). An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores between the two groups, yielding a p-value greater than 0.05, confirming no statistically significant difference. This result establishes baseline equivalency between the two groups.

The similarity in scores indicates that participants in both groups had comparable levels of proficiency in linking sounds before the intervention. This balance is crucial for drawing valid conclusions about the effectiveness of the instructional method applied to the experimental group.

Table 1: Independent Samples t-Test for Pretest Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Experimental	29	2.52	0.85	-1.07	58	0.29
Control	30	2.76	1.03	-1.12	58	0.29

4.2 Posttest Results

Control Group: Scores increased marginally, but the improvement was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). The mean posttest score was 3.01 (SD = 1.10), showing minimal progress from the pretest score of 2.76. The outcome suggests that traditional instructional methods did not lead to meaningful development in students' ability to recognize and use linking sounds in spoken English.

Experimental Group: Scores increased significantly, with the mean rising to 4.21 (SD = 0.78). A paired samples t-test indicated a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.05$), with scores increasing between 2.1 and 4.9 points. Moreover, the standard deviation decreased compared to the pretest, indicating that students in the experimental group demonstrated more consistent learning outcomes.

These findings suggest that incorporating songs as a teaching tool for linking sounds was effective, as evidenced by the significant improvements in students' posttest scores.

Table 2: Paired Samples t-Test for Posttest Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD	t	df	p-value
Experimental	29	2.52	0.85	4.21	0.78	6.38	29	0.000
Control	30	2.76	1.03	3.01	1.10	1.12	30	0.27

4.3 Questionnaire Results

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha for the scale consisting of 10 items under the section "Learners' attitudes toward the use of English songs in teaching linking sounds" yielded a coefficient of 0.78. This value exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.6, which is commonly

recognized as the reliability benchmark in social science research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The result indicates a good level of internal consistency among the items, suggesting that they coherently reflect learners' attitudes. Therefore, the scale's items are suitable and reliable for this study.

The posttest questionnaire revealed that students in the experimental group responded positively to learning linking sounds through songs. The highest-rated item (M = 4.44) was "Listening to songs improves my ability to recognize linking sounds," indicating that students felt this method was particularly beneficial for auditory perception. The lowest-rated item (M = 3.72) was "Using songs is more engaging than traditional exercises," suggesting that while students found songs helpful, some may have still preferred conventional methods for practice.

In terms of speaking confidence, responses showed moderate variance (SD = 1.05), highlighting individual differences in the application of learned features in spontaneous speech. Some students reported significant improvements in their ability to connect words smoothly, while others noted difficulty in transferring these skills outside of structured listening exercises.

Overall, the results indicate that using songs as an instructional method for linking sounds was perceived as beneficial, leading to increased recognition and improved speaking fluency among students in the experimental group.

4.4 Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence that English songs significantly enhance Vietnamese EFL students' recognition and production of linking sounds at Saigon Bach Khoa Sai Gon College. The marked improvement in the experimental group, compared to minimal gains in the control group, confirms the effectiveness of songs as a pedagogical tool, building on but extending prior findings by Murphey (1992) and Lems (2001). A key contribution of this research lies in its focus on linking sounds—an area often underexplored in Vietnamese contexts—through the lens of music-assisted pronunciation instruction.

The study reveals that the rhythmic structure and emotional engagement of songs promote automaticity and reduce learners' anxiety, supporting Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. Furthermore, the reduced performance gap among learners indicates that songs support a wider range of proficiency levels. Importantly, this research integrates multimodal learning theory, showing that combining auditory, rhythmic, and emotional stimuli strengthens phonological awareness and supports procedural memory for connected speech.

While gains in perception were evident, not all learners fully transferred this awareness into productive use, suggesting that song-based instruction should be complemented with explicit pronunciation training and communicative practice. In addition, the quantitative data on learner attitudes show high levels of agreement and positivity towards the use of English songs in teaching linking sounds. These results offer a well-supported and satisfactory answer to the second research question, confirming that learners not only benefit cognitively but also respond affectively and motivationally to music-based instruction. Overall, the findings affirm that English songs offer a practical, motivating, and culturally adaptable method for improving pronunciation in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical support for using English songs to enhance Vietnamese EFL learners' ability to recognize and produce linking sounds. Music-based instruction proved more engaging and effective than traditional approaches, highlighting its potential in pronunciation pedagogy. Integrating songs into pronunciation lessons can foster fluency, accuracy, and learner autonomy while making learning more enjoyable. These findings emphasize the benefits of combining linguistic instruction with musical input to develop connected speech features.

Educators should incorporate songs into pronunciation instruction to enhance awareness of connected speech. Teacher training programs should also address the design of effective music-based lessons. Future research should examine the long-term impact of music-based instruction, compare different musical genres, and integrate song-based activities with communicative speaking tasks. Additionally, pronunciation materials should align with learners' proficiency levels and include clear examples of linking sounds. This study was limited by a short intervention period and self-reported data. Future research should extend the duration, increase sample size, and include acoustic analysis for objective assessment.

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The author declares no competing interests.

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HIỆU QUẢ CỦA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG BÀI HÁT TIẾNG ANH TRONG GIẢNG DẠY NỐI ÂM CHO NGƯỜI HỌC TIẾNG ANH NHƯ MỘT NGOẠI NGỮ (EFL) TẠI TRƯỜNG CAO ĐẲNG BÁCH KHOA SÀI GÒN

Phạm Quốc Cường

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Tóm tắt: *Nghiên cứu này khảo sát tác động của việc sử dụng bài hát tiếng Anh nhằm nâng cao khả năng nhận diện và phát âm các âm nối của người học tiếng Anh tại Trường Cao đẳng Bách Khoa Sài Gòn. Các âm nối, một đặc điểm quan trọng của nối âm, gây nhiều khó khăn do sự khác biệt về ngữ âm giữa tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu sử dụng thiết kế bán thực nghiệm, trong đó nhóm thực nghiệm được giảng dạy bằng bài hát tiếng Anh, còn nhóm đối chứng được đào tạo phát âm theo phương pháp truyền thống. Dữ liệu định lượng từ bài kiểm tra trước và sau, kết hợp với bảng khảo sát, cho thấy sự cải thiện đáng kể về mặt thống kê trong khả năng nhận diện và phát âm âm nối của nhóm thực nghiệm. Nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh lợi ích sư phạm của việc tích hợp âm nhạc vào giảng dạy phát âm và đưa ra các gợi ý cho thực tiễn giảng dạy cũng như nghiên cứu trong tương lai.*

Từ khoá: *bài hát tiếng Anh, giảng dạy phát âm, nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm, người học tiếng Anh, nối âm*

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Ghi chú

Tác giả xác nhận không có tranh chấp về lợi ích đối với bài báo này.