

Improving Students' Pronunciation by Using English Songs

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Abstract

Pronunciation is one of the important aspects of language learning. The bad pronunciation will influence the understanding of the listener to grab the message. Song is one of the media that can be used to teach pronunciation. By using songs, students can learn how the word is pronounced. Thus, this paper discusses how to improve students' pronunciation by using English songs. The result of the study showed that songs could improve students' pronunciation and confidence. Even, one of the very shy students in the class is enjoying the lessons; they can pronounce the vocabulary correctly and confidently.

Keywords: Pronunciation; English Songs

Introduction

English has become an essential part of our daily life in contemporary society. English is an important language, as people all around the world use it as a tool for communication. In Thailand, English language has played a significant role since King Rama VI issued the Compulsory Education Act of 1921 and English became a mandatory subject for students beyond Grade 4 in the national curriculum (Durongphan, et al., 1982:89). Moreover, a recent national curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education stated that English should be taught throughout the twelve years of the basic education system. The Basic Core Curriculum issued in 2020 prescribes standards for teaching and learning English pronunciation that young learners have ability to “pronounce and spell words; accurately read aloud group of words, sentences, simple texts and chants by observing the principle of reading ” (Ministry of Education,2020:8).

Pronunciation is the way in which we pronounce a word, especially in a way that is accepted or generally understood. In English, there are many sounds and words which do not exist in Thai language. As a result, it is difficult for Thai students to pronounce words that consist of consonant sounds such as /s/, /z/,/t/,/k/,/g/ etc. Most Thai students incorrectly pronounce or mispronounce the final sound in English pronunciation.

Although some sounds used in English pronunciation also appear in the Thai language, but the position of the sounds that are made are different. In the English language, the final sound is pronounced, which is unlike the Thai language. Consequently, Thai students always have problem pronouncing the final sound clearly when they speak English. Wei (2002: 74) conducted research to investigate the problem of pronunciation and found that students may be too shy to successfully speak English with native speakers. Moreover, the final consonants



are always unclear and unvoiced. There are many problems when students pronounce the sound of consonants that are related by points of articulation, manners of articulation, and aspirated or non-aspirated voicing. Nathong (1977:82) emphasizes that pronunciation problems are caused by phonemic and distributional problems. Doff (1993:58) stated that the problem with teaching English as a Foreign Language in English is the difficulty experienced by students with the consonant sounds that do not appear in the target language, such as sound of /th/ and similar sounds like /b/ and /p/. Smyth (1987:47) pointed out that the sound systems used in Thai and English are different. For example, most Thai consonant sounds have aspirated and voiceless stops, while English consonant sounds are fricative. Pronunciation is an important skill in learning English as it creates not only the positive first impression of the speaker and but always conveys correct message between the speaker and the listener. In other words, pronunciation helps the speaker to be more clearly understood. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand incorrect pronunciation. Morley (1991:46) stated that it is necessary to teach English pronunciation in the ESL or EFL classroom.

Pronunciation now has a position of prominence in the Thai school curriculum. The curriculum designers are also aware of the importance of pronunciation as it has become an integrated part of language learning. It consists of more elements than just consonant and vowel sounds. It also includes the elements of rhythm and intonation which support the communication process. In other words, if one wants to gain communicative competence, one has to study pronunciation.

Songs are teaching materials that teachers can use with young learners. Songs can be used in a variety of ways. The English language can be practiced in linguistic areas, starting with vocabulary and grammatical structures, and ending with rhythm, stress, fluency and pronunciation. Songs are authentic materials that motivate students to learn English and look forward to the lessons in the classroom. Lo & Li. (1998:92) stated that songs play a significant role in motivating students to learn English. Singing songs and listening to music are enjoyable for learners. They are more relaxed and attentive than usual, and therefore more receptive to learning. Songs can motivate and captivate the attention of second language learners. They can support the development of the ability of a learner to read, write, listen and speak, as well as providing opportunities for learning pronunciation.

Teaching English pronunciation is an important aspect of both teaching and learning the language. In this study, teaching pronunciation was intended to help students gain knowledge in terms of English pronunciation as well as use their existing knowledge.

The students were taught to practice the pronunciation of English sounds, a summary of the pronunciation of common final sounds. For example, students were taught contrasting pairs like /t/ and /d/. They were instructed to repeat the phonemes in words, as well as in isolation, and the students were also asked to identify them in order to visually represent the differences they were listening for. By using a creative approach like songs, a teacher can ensure that the

students are adequately equipped for the English speaking world with the necessary tools they need to make themselves understood.

1. Teenagers

As we see, teenagers are an object that is interesting to be discussed. It is caused because of the nature of the teenagers themselves. They are able to work with others and learn from others (Scott, Wandy A and Ytleberg, Lisbeth H. 1990:2-4). They also love to play. Moreover, they are not only active, but also very intelligent.

As listed above, teenagers are able to work with others and learn from others. Connected with the educational worlds, this characteristic of teenager is exceptionally beneficial to the teaching and learning process. It makes the teacher easier to convey the material to the students. Because based on the nature, they can work in group and learn something from their friends. Out of the educational scope, teenager is a pleased period. They can do anything they want to do. They do not think that it disturbs others or not. They also do not think that it inflicts others or not. They can play the whole time as they want. It is appropriate to their nature that they love to play. Moreover, teenagers are very active. It is in line with Donaldson's opinion that the teenager tries to make sense of the world. They do something as though they don't have fatigue. They will do anything, provided they are happy. Here, their enthusiasm in doing something they like is very great. And their enthusiasm in doing something is a source of their energy to do activities they want to do (Cameron, Lyne, 2001:4).

Besides the reasons above, teenagers are intelligent. They will try to solve a problem around them that sometimes cannot be solved by adults. As Cameron says that "the teenager is seen as continually interacting with the world around her/him, solving problems that are presented by the neighbors (Scott, Wandy A and Ytleberg, Lisbeth H. 1990:2-4). For example, there are two youngsters, an elder sister and her younger brother. At that time, they went sightseeing by bike. The kickstand of the bike was broken. The elder sister was confused thinking how to repair the kickstand. Without much thinking, the younger brother repaired the kickstand optimistically. And finally, the younger brother succeeded in repairing the kickstand. From the example above, we see that teenagers are intelligent.

2. Song

2.1 Definition of Song

"A song is a short piece in one concise movement for the medium of solo voice and piano" (Simms, R. Bryan, 1993:29). According to Parto (1996:99), a song is a group of arrangements which consists of lyrics and elements of music like rhythm, melody, harmony and expressions. Moreover, "A song is a musical composition for the voice of several voices", and short poem whether intended to be sung or not; a lyric or ballad". It is said in The American Heritage Dictionaries. "Music is a brief composition written or adapted for singing. It also says that song is a distinctive or characteristic sound made by an animal, such as a bird or an insect. The last definition about song is poetry, a verse and a lyrics poem or ballad".



Other definitions of song are listed below: "Song is the act of singing, the characteristics sound produced by a bird; a short musical composition with word, a successful musical must have at least three good songs. It is also said that song is a distinctive or characteristic sound. Besides that, song is the imperial dynasty of China from 960 to 1279 and a very small sum"

Based on the references above, it shows that song is a group of beautiful words in which there is a message in it to be conveyed to other people and presented with beautiful music. It deals with some themes. It deals with story, advice, study, religion, environment, universe, love, happy and sad feeling.

We have seen the definition of song above. And now, let us talk about song. It is viewed, song is a group of beautiful words in which there are a message to be conveyed to individuals who have not reached puberty (Hornby, A.S., 1995:192) and presented with a beautiful music so that they can get the message from it easily. But in fact, it can be enjoyed by everyone. It can be enjoyed by teenagers, adults, and even old people.

3. Teaching of Song as Media

Language teachers can use songs as part of their classroom teaching repertoire. Songs containing authentic language, are easily obtainable, provide vocabulary, grammar and cultural aspects and are fun for the students.

They can provide valuable speaking, listening and language practice in and out of the classroom. According to Arsyad (2006:4) teaching of songs as media is used to convey educational messages¹⁰. Another definition of teaching songs as media are performs of communication either printed or audio visual and the tools.

From the two definitions above, it can be said that teaching media is used by the teacher to convey the teaching material to the students. It can be printed or audio visual and the tools. Media are needed in teaching and learning process because of several factors.

Sudjana and Rifai said that they have benefits in it. They are: (Arsyad, Azhar, 2006:24)

1. The teaching process will be more interesting so that the students can be motivated to learn the material given by the teacher. By using media, the teacher can attract the students' attention to the material given by him/her. From the explanation above, it is expected that by using media in teaching and learning process, students will be motivated in learning the material given by the teacher by heart. If they learn by heart they will automatically get a maximum result.

2. The material will be clearer so that the students can understand the material easily. Media make students easier in catching the material given by the teacher. Here, media act as the means used by the teacher to make the teaching material easier and clearer so the students can catch the material easily. If the students can catch the material easily they can automatically understand it easily too. As a simple sample is a white board. The teacher writes the material which is conveyed to the students on the board in a form of diagram and writes the explanation of the diagram so that students can catch it easily.

3. There will be a variation in the teaching and learning process. It makes students enjoy the teaching and learning process. Students will feel bored if the teacher only uses the explanation when presenting the material during the teaching and learning process. Students will not feel bored if the teacher uses media in teaching and learning process. They feel that there is a variation in it.

4. Students can do more activities in teaching and learning process. For example, the teacher gives a topic to be discussed and the students do the discussion. According to Derek Rowntree, Educational Media have functions to:

- 1) Motivate students to study.
- 2) Review what students have learnt.
- 3) Give a stimulus to study.
- 4) Activate students' responses.
- 5) Give a feedback soon (Rohani, Ahmand, 1997:7-8)

From the references above, it can be seen that teaching songs as media is needed in teaching learning process. It is because students are motivated to study. Students can catch the material from the teacher clearly. The teaching learning processes have more varieties so make students enjoy it. Students will be more active in giving responses to the material given by the teacher.

4. Characteristics of Vocational School Students

As we see, most of Vocational School students are at the age of fourteen to seventeen years old. To know the characteristics of them, we can see from the opinions conveyed by Scott and Ytleberg (1990: 2-4) below: "Students of vocational School are users of mother tongue and language target. They can tell the difference between fact and fiction. They love to play and get the best when they enjoy themselves. But they also take themselves seriously and like to think that what they are doing is real work. They are also enthusiastic and positive about learning. They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical word to convey understandable meaning. They are able to work with others and learn from others".

From the characteristics above, we know that vocational School students have a great enthusiasm in learning something they like. It does not mean that they do not need a guide in learning something they like. They still need a guide in learning something. It is because in line with their nature, they love to play. They can forget the main assignment they have to do because they focus on the game they are doing. Moreover, they need help from adults. Teenagers can do and understand much more pronouncing English considered as a local content course in Vocational School, because English is needed in any aspects of life.



5. Pronunciation

This part talks about pronunciation. Firstly, it discusses definition of pronunciation. The next discussion is teaching pronunciation.

5.1 Definition of Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way a word or a language is usually spoken, the manner in which someone utters a word. In line with the definitions above, Hornby says that pronunciation is the way in which a language is spoken, the way in which a word is pronounced, the way a person speaks the words of a language. From the definitions above, it shows conclusion that pronunciation is the way person utters a word or a language (Hornby, A.S., 1995:928).

5.2 Aim of Pronunciation

There are many factors that influence language teaching especially English pronunciation teaching. Besides teacher should select the media that is suitable to be applied in teaching English pronunciation, they are also hoped to know how to teach pronunciation well. By knowing the good way in teaching English pronunciation. According to Jeremy Harmer's alternatives in pronunciation teaching:

"There have three alternatives to convey. First, whole lesson: making pronunciation the main focus of lesson does not mean that every minute of the lesson has to be spent on pronunciation work. Second, discrete slots: some teachers insert short, separate bits of pronunciation work into lesson sequences. And the last alternative is integrated phases: many teachers get students to focus on pronunciation issues as an integrated part of lesson (Harmer. Jeremy. 2002:1883)

In this case, teacher decides what alternative he or she chooses. By deciding the alternatives he or she uses in teaching English pronunciation, he or she can make a strategy based on the alternative to get a maximum result. Moreover, the most important thing of the teaching and learning process is the understanding of the students about the lesson. Cameron says that "it is a crucial thing for teachers to take the responsibility for checking whether their pupils understand the language being used and the purpose of activities being carried out". In this case, the teacher should let the students know that they are studying about pronunciation and they are expected to be able to pronounce English words correctly (Cameron, Lyne, 2001:40).

It needs an enthusiasm in teaching English pronunciation so that both the teacher and the students get a good result in it. It can be done by encouraging the students that they can do the best. Besides that, it also can be done by asking the students to present their ability in pronouncing English words so other students know that they can do it well. By this, students have a great spirit to learn how to pronounce English words well.

6. Song as Media in Teaching English Pronunciations

This part talks about songs as media in teaching English pronunciation. There are two parts in this sub chapter. First is contribution of teenager's songs in teaching English pronunciation. And the second is the way of applying songs in teaching English pronunciation.

There are many reasons why teenager's songs are good for English pronunciation. It has many contributions in pronunciation teaching. For example:

a. Kramer states that songs are good for English teaching because, songs are funny. They promote mimics, gestures etc, and associated to the meaning. They are good to introduce suprasegmental phonetics. Students play a participative role. They can be applied to comprehension stages (listening) or production (singing). There are songs for all ages and levels. Students can learn English very easily through echoic memory. (Kramer, Daniel J. 2003:78)

b. Songs can add feeling and rhythm to language practice that might otherwise be flat. "They also help and remember things more easily and draw more deeply into a lesson. (Paul, David, 2003:58)

c. Music and rhythm are much easier to imitate and remember language than words which are just spoken (Philips, Sarah. 1993:45).

From the statements above, we know that song is funny and interesting. As we see, most of teenagers like something funny. With their interest in song, will make the process of teaching English pronunciation easier. The writer assume that it is effective using song in teaching English pronunciation to Vocational School students because they learn something by using something funny that is a song.

Students especially teenager will have zest in learning something if they take part in it. Zest of students influences their result in their study. In this case, teacher should use a medium that can make students have a great enthusiasm in learning something because they can take part in it. In my opinion, it is good for teacher to use song in teaching English pronunciation to Vocational School students.

Because they can take part in it by following the song when it is played. As Paul said that song also helps remember things more easily and draws more deeply into a lesson. So it is very pleasant for the teacher to use song in teaching English pronunciation. Teenagers can remember the right way of pronouncing the words easily. With a good remembrance of how to pronounce the words as they heard on the song given by the teacher, it is expected that they can apply it in pronouncing English words not only in singing a song but also anytime they speak in English.

Besides that, songs also make students much easier to imitate and remember language than words which are just spoken. Students will get bored if they just hear a lecture from the teacher of how to pronounce English well. Teacher can make students know how to pronounce



English well by using songs to remember and imitate the song, because they like and interested in it.

In this case, teacher is hoped to be selective in choosing a song that will be used in English pronunciation teaching. They are to choose interesting song so that the students are attracted in them. A song is learnt only when the learner understands the meaning of the language item contained in it.

After preparing and choosing the right song, some steps should apply as Suk Mei Lo, Chi Fai Lo and Cakir opinions in Rina Utami (2002:65). Here are ways of applying song in classroom:

1. Suk Mei Lo and Chi Fai Lo say that song is applied in teaching and learning process by: "First, teacher hands out the lyrics of song to the students or write it in the board. Then the teacher explains the meaning of the lyrics and tells the way how to pronounce it. After that, teacher asks the students to read the text aloud. The next step is letting the students listen to the songs three times.

The first time students purely listen, the second time sing with the tape, and the last time sing without tape. The last step is asking the students to do exercises"

2. The steps suggested by Cakir:

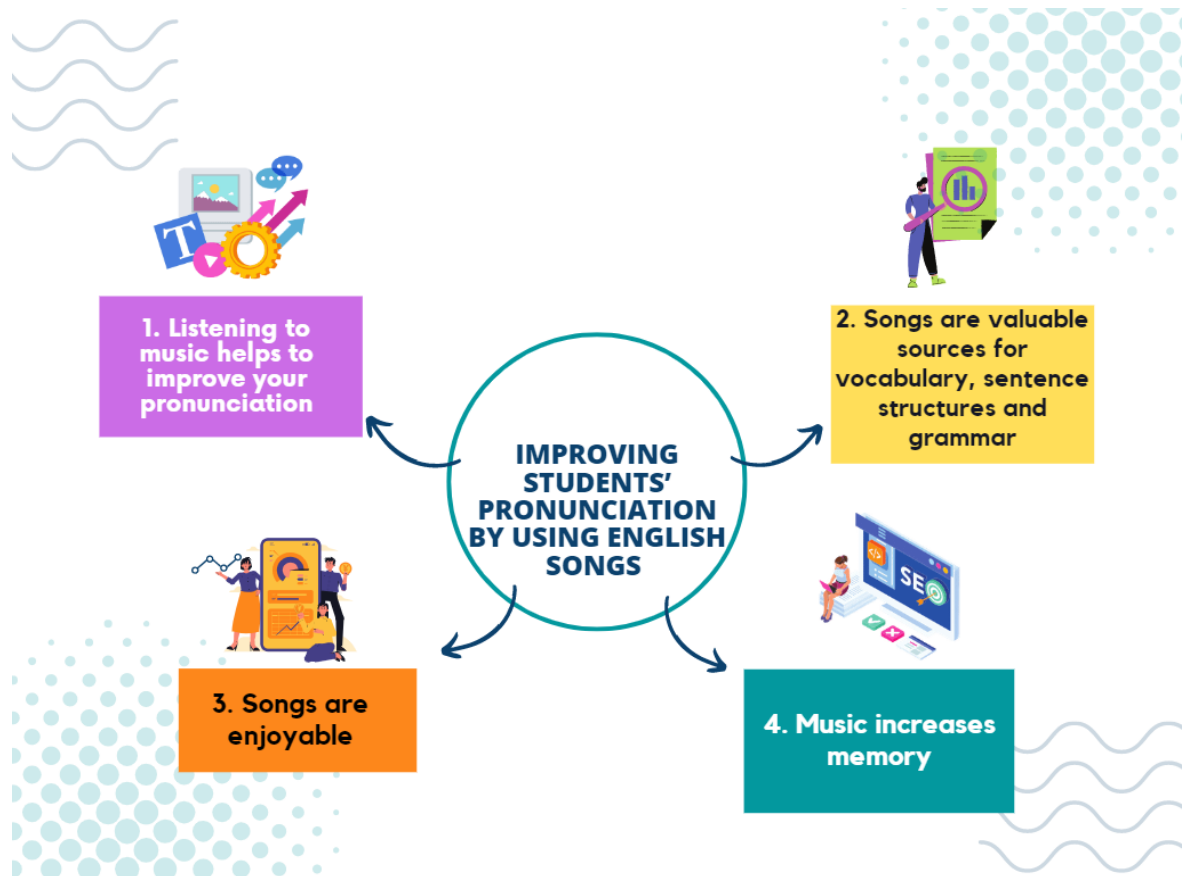
"First, students listen to the songs from cassette. Second, teacher repeats the song in spoken form. Teacher and students repeat the song together. Once again, students listen to the song from cassette. And the last is the repetition of the song in the instrumental version".

Based on the references above, the writer supposes the following activities to be applied in the classroom. First, teacher hands out the lyrics of the songs or writes them on the board. Second, teacher explains the meaning of the songs and lets the students know the meaning of each word. Third, teacher plays or sings the songs many times. Fourth, teacher lets the students know how to pronounce the words of the songs correctly. Fifth, teacher gives the students an example of the way how to sing the songs.

Sixth, teacher asks the students to repeat the songs using right pronunciation after him/her. After mastering the intonation of the song, teacher asks the students to sing the song together. After that teacher asks the students to sing the song by themselves. The last is teacher asks the students to exercises related to the songs.

Knowledge from the Study

Music has become part of our life. We listen to music every day and we all know that music has a great impact not only on our mental health but on our cognitive abilities also. But do you really know that music is proven to be a useful tool in learning languages? Music can help us improve our listening skills and pronunciation, therefore it potentially helps us enhance our speaking skills as well. Now, let's see the benefits of music in learning English as a second language and how to use music as an English learning tool.



1. Listening to music helps to improve your pronunciation

Pronunciation is one of the most difficult aspects to master when it comes to learning a new language. Learning English through songs will definitely help to train your accent. When you learn your English songs, you will tend to repeat the songs again and again. And hence you will enjoy practising English instinctively.

2. Songs are valuable sources for vocabulary, sentence structures and grammar

Songs can provide the opportunity for vocabulary practice. They are usually based on a theme or topic that can offer the context for vocabulary learning.

The more you listen to the lyrics, the better your English vocabulary becomes. At first, you may not completely understand the lyrics. But comprehension improves over time as you sing and discuss the music with your classmates, family, and friends.

Furthermore, many English songs have a simple sentence structure and conversational language that we can easily understand. And therefore, we can learn them by heart quickly.

3. Songs are enjoyable

We can surely become bored out of our mind by repeatedly listening to a narration or dialogue as we attempt to understand the meaning of a new word or phrase in context. That's



why we need music to boost our motivation in learning English. Fundamentally, popular songs touch the lives of us and are connected with our various interest and everyday experiences. Music, therefore, has become an important part of our daily life. We listen to music to reduce anxiety, to stay positive, to relax. The rhythm and melody of songs enable us to listen to them over and over again. And English songs are useful for us to acquire English.

4. Music increases memory

There's no doubt that listening to your favorite music can instantly put you in a good mood. But scientists are now discovering that music can do more for you than just lift your spirits.

Research has shown that listening to music is one of the best ways to stimulate both sides of our brain. It has a positive impact on not only learning English but also general learning. When we listen to music on a regular basis, we are at the same time improving our memory.

Okay, you've just known the benefits of music in learning English. Now it's time to listen to your favorite songs and sing along! If you don't know how to use music effectively as an English learning tool, check out our blog post [here](#). And don't forget to share with us what you think about music's usage in our life.

Oh wait... You want to improve English vocabulary through songs? There is a useful app that will help you learn vocabulary effectively with SO MUCH MUCH FUN!! All you need to do is download it to your phone, watch a music a video, look up new words and save them for further learning.

Conclusion

Learning by using songs can provide many benefits. In the context of learning English, the song provides the learning material for improving pronunciation and self-confidence. Teachers need to know the students' level. It is important especially to link with the vocabulary difficulty in the song lyric. Besides, the teachers need to consider with the learning objective, if the teachers aim to improve the students' pronunciation for daily communication purpose, the lyric of the song need contain with the everyday vocabulary.

After choosing the appropriate song with the learning objective and students' level, the teachers need to introduce English vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson. It aims to make the students understand with the lyric; the activity can be translating the vocabulary.

After the students understand the vocabulary, the next activity is singing the song together. The teachers can create a variation in conducting this activity, such as singing in a line of the students' desk; horizontally or vertically. This activity is undertaken in several times until the students can pronounce the vocabulary correctly. Then, the teachers give the pronunciation task. This stage is done by providing some answer choice in the form of the homophone or homograph vocabulary. Then the teachers pronounce the vocabulary and

students find the vocabulary from the available option. In this activity, the teachers need to consider the instruction. It needs to be clear; better if the teachers give an example before starting the task.

The last is asking the students to pronounce vocabulary independently. The students pronounce each of the lyrics in parallel.

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