

UTILIZING A KARAOKE APP IN LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION: A CASE STUDY OF EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Hanna Maria Panggabean¹, Lika Silvia Batubara²

Politeknik IT&B, Medan, Indonesia

Politeknik IT&B, Medan, Indonesia

hannapanggabean15@gmail.com, silvialika4@gmail.com

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Abstract

The use of karaoke songs as an instrument to learn English pronunciation is considered to be an enjoyable learning method especially to enhance English as Foreign Language (EFL) students' pronunciation skills. In discourse activities, unclear pronunciation might affect the interpretation among peers which might lead to misunderstanding or miscommunication. Because the world is becoming more global, EFL college students as future generations will need to improve English pronunciation to participate in future international meetings. As Smith (2003) stated, native speakers, tended to be concerned about pronunciation when having conversations with non-native speakers. To minimize misinterpretation, English pronunciation should be given higher attention in listening and speaking instruction. This study surveyed 30 EFL students' experience of learning pronunciation by utilizing a karaoke app, more specifically after listening to an English song and singing via 'Smule-Sing!' karaoke app. This study explained that the listening and singing activities through 'Smule-Sing!' karaoke app assisted EFL learners to produce clear pronunciation devices including word stress, rhythm, intonation, and sounds. However, there are some limitations regarding melody rate and unfamiliarity to the sounds which need to have further research. This study implies the English language and pedagogy to promote and facilitate autonomous learning strategy in EFL students' learning process.

Keywords— autonomous learning strategy; English pronunciation; karaoke app; listening and speaking strategy; music.

Introduction

Pronunciation is a part of crucial aspect of language learning that advances English learners' speaking fluency. In language pedagogy, the listening and speaking learning process is the integral part as the more language users acquire more input such as vocabulary, pronunciation, phrases, collocation, idioms, and many more through listening, then they will be able to express ideas and thoughts. According to Hockett (1950), the sound we make when we speak between interlocutors is called pronunciation. If each of the interlocutors speaks the same language followed by the speech organ's movement, it will create understanding which is a goal of communication. Therefore, accurate pronunciation can lead to effective communication otherwise, some errors in pronunciation may fail in conveying the message and cause communication issues (p. 261).

Like future generations, it is necessary to prepare EFL college students for having excellent speaking fluency since they will encounter business meetings to create cooperation and projects across the world. However, most EFL college students admit that they are struggling to learn how to pronounce the word correctly, leading them difficult to follow up speaking practices. As consequence, this problem may lead to reticence to speak. Furthermore, Smith (2003) explained that miscommunication mostly occurs when a native speaker and non-native speaker involves in the conversation. The native speaker often causes misinterpretation

towards what the non-native speaker has been said (p. 114). To overcome this issue, EFL students need to master English pronunciation by having frequent listening and speaking practices with autonomous learning strategies. If EFL college students can speak fluently and naturally thus it will guide them to improve their reading and writing abilities. This would also help them to build consciousness to their speech (Jones & Evans, 1995).

There are multiple strategies to practice English pronunciation. One of the effective ways to learn pronunciation is by applying music because it can help the students feel relaxed and enjoyable to identify the lyrics, rhythm and stress, sentence patterns and syntax, vocabulary then understand the meaning behind the song (Richards, 2012). Music and songs play important roles in language studies because they represent the forms of communication through rhythmic and melodic content so that the students can adapt this method to the real conversation (Jolly, 1975, p.11). A routine task in listening to music and singing the song would aid the students to enhance their pronunciation skills since the repetition and melody offered by songs could stimulate the students to memorize and drill the vocabulary knowledge, grammatical structure, and pronunciation, thus the learners would be more prepared in the real-life conversation (Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Cunningham, 2014; Farmand¹ & Pourgharib², 2013; Jolly, 1975; Mora, 2000; Moradi & Shahrokhi, 2014)

Due to these reasons, this study explored EFL college students' learning experience when learning pronunciation by utilizing 'Smule Sing!' karaoke app to explore whether listening and singing activity is effective to help EFL learners in producing pronunciation devices (word stress, rhythm, and intonation, sounds). Since EFL college students experience online learning, they build an autonomous learning behavior to keep them on the learning track. The teacher here plays as a facilitator to control the students by providing some learning materials to complete at home. 'Smule Sing!' karaoke app is selected because this is one of the popular karaoke apps, some features are uncomplicated and secured to EFL college students. This study aims to answer the following research questions: First if there is a correlation between the EFL students' learning experience after utilizing a karaoke app to their pronunciation enhancement. Second, whether EFL college students gain more benefits or face more difficulties after utilizing a karaoke app to learn English pronunciation. The significance of the study is to figure out whether listening and singing activities via a karaoke app help the students enhance their pronunciation skills and student awareness of the speech they perform.

Literature Review

Learning English Pronunciation through Music and Songs

In general, the traditional teaching of the English learning process tended to create a tedious learning atmosphere, making it difficult to draw the learner's attention to the lessons being delivered. Since the students have different learning behavior, it would be better for the teacher to consider a new learning strategy to enhance the student's willingness to learn. Therefore, Smith, (1971) suggested providing the appropriate learning approach that fulfills the individual learning styles. In his study, he applied a flexible learning environment by providing integrated study (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) materials. Unlike 'regular' classroom activities, the students were given material for group discussion after finishing autonomous learning. The finding showed better signs of the student's progress. It is seen that the slower students start to speak without a lack of confidence while the faster students improve reading and writing ability.

Furthermore, Yates (2002) defined pronunciation as the production of sounds that are used in the meaning-making process. The sound is divided into suprasegmental and segmental aspects. The suprasegmental aspect includes stress, intonation, and voice quality while the segmental aspect focuses on identifying vowel, diphthong, triphthong, or consonant sounds. This strategy would assist the students to recognize the sounds and lead them to pronounce the words accurately.

However, the students sometimes did not realize when they pronounce words incorrectly. It may happen because linguistic features in the target language are intensely different from their first language. In Saito et al., (2015) study, they explored how linguistics

could influence comprehensibility and accentedness in the second language (L2) learners' extemporaneous speech. They used 40 native French speakers from different proficiency levels. The result showed that comprehensibility was associated with several linguistic variables (vowel/consonant errors, word stress, fluency, lexis, grammar), whereas accentedness was chiefly linked to pronunciation (vowel/consonant errors, word stress). It indicates that native speakers are highly concerned about pronunciation while non-native speakers made a mistake in using lexis and grammar. Therefore, learning English pronunciation should play a great deal of attention for EFL college students.

However, teaching instruction focusing on English pronunciation is limited. The teachers believe that pronunciation is only a minor part of English learning which made students have little motivation in learning pronunciation. Some studies explained that many ESL teachers have no formal preparation to teach pronunciation which led them to rely on their intuition. Nevertheless, this teaching application could be unrealistic and unfair. Another problem showed that teachers focus on pronunciation textbooks heavily without figuring out the students' learning issues. It is not truly effective considering that most materials were designed with no basis in pronunciation research as well as teachers. Therefore, they may not be able to make wise choices on whether it is specifically intended for pronunciation instruction. "The consequences of inadequate teacher preparation are that many students simply do not receive any instruction, or they are directed to focus on the most salient characteristics of their accent, regardless of their influence on intelligibility" (Derwing & Munro, 2005, p. 389).

Furthermore, utilizing music as an instrument to support language learning has been discussed in some studies. Since music could bring an enjoyable environment, (Richards, 2012) stated that songs can be used to teach English without any pressure. The lyrics and the melody help students memorize some useful phrases. In English pronunciation cases, songs help English learners practice minimal pairs drills, for example, to recognize diphthongs, and also establish the feeling of the rhythm and stress in spoken English. This study is supported by Coyle & Gracia, (2014) who explored the study of song-based activity in a group of five-year-old Spanish EFL learners. This study focused on the potential of pedagogy implication with children's comprehension and production of L2 vocabulary. The result showed that most of the children acquired some receptive vocabulary knowledge from the song input and follow-up activities and, many children were able to recall more words one month after the lessons had taken place than immediately afterward.

Mora, (2000) also believed that singing was a pleasant way to memorize words, expressions, and phrases. The melodic approach was one of the useful techniques when teachers tried to improve their students' pronunciation abilities. A lyric in songs benefited the students to improve pronunciation skills through singing activity, at the same time, the repetitive lyrics songs also performed a positive effect on the students' language acquisition level. On the other hand, Isaacs & Trofimovich (2010) argued that musical ability had no link to L2 pronunciation. In their study, they analyzed the hypotheses of whether the high musical listeners were more attuned to certain aspects of L2 pronunciation than their less musical peers. The result found that the higher musical ability was the most difficult to understand the L2 speech.

Furthermore, Moradi & Shahrokhi (2014) investigated the effect of listening activities to music on Iranian children's segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation. Since English was not a mother tongue in Iran, learners should invest a lot of work to learn English as a foreign language. This study focused on the use of song as an innovative teaching instrument to improve students' segmental articulation (including the pronunciation of vowels, consonants, and triphthongs) and suprasegmental articulation (including stress pattern and intonation). They divided the students into the experimental and control group. The first result showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in segmental articulation and suprasegmental articulation.

Another learning approach related to music is by applying karaoke into practice. Erten, (2015) suggested that karaoke activity was useful to teach English pronunciation. The repetitiveness of lyrics in a song could lead learners to involve the production of the target language. He also stated that this activity contributes to the development of such language knowledge through carefully selected songs and activities. In this study, the researcher

attempted to use the ‘Smule-sing!’ karaoke app as an instrument to collect the data. It was a social media app in which the students were not only able to sing along with the running text but also had their voices electronically recorded. When the students listened to their recording, it helped them be more aware of their pronunciation.

Based on the previous study, the study about learning English pronunciation through listening to music was worth to be further adopted. Especially, how the perception of the adult EFL learners towards their pronunciation after listening to the music. The study about perception is necessary to be conducted for the learners could explore the knowledge from what they had learned. In sum, learning through music benefits learners to establish a positive learning state, energize learning activities, increase attention, improve memory, release tension, enhance imagination, develop inspiration and motivation, add an element of fun and provide an enjoyable and practical environment (Arjomad et al., 2015).

This present study adopted this instruction as an assignment to a group of college students from different majors. They must enhance their language proficiency because they would face different interactions with business counterparts forcing them to use English as a medium to communicate. Since they are non-native speakers, it is considered that they may not be able to master all aspects of language learning, especially English pronunciation. To overcome this gap, these students need to be more aware of their English pronunciation. While the learners followed online learning, EFL college students somehow need to use their leisure time effectively for enhancing their pronunciation (such as paying attention to minimal pairs, intonation, rhythms, linking words, and word stress) that unconsciously had not been completed yet.

Research Method

Participants

The participant was selected from Indonesian students who are studying in Politeknik IT&B Medan from different departments which learn English as a foreign language and use the Indonesian language as their mother tongue. 76 students were assigned to participate within one week as a part of the English assignment. However, there was 30 intermediate to advanced EFL students with the age range within 18-20 y.o. which had been selected as data considering that some students were absent for the submission and others were under intermediate level. The level of proficiency was known by the EF English Set score which had been administered when attending an English course. The sample size in this study was limited due to time constraints.

Instruments

In this study, the researcher used several instruments which consisted of Smule-sing! karaoke app and questionnaire to collect the data. The research was conducted outside the classroom as a self-study form. Firstly, the researcher described the procedure to the selected students before conducting the treatment. The students openly chose a selected English song that was familiar to them. Then, the students did a treatment by using Smule-sing! karaoke app. Having done the treatment, an online questionnaire was designed and distributed electronically to all students. The questionnaire was comprised of the easiness, enjoyment, pronunciation skill, advantages, and limitations when using this online music method. To control the variation of the songs, the five Western classic songs which had average rhythms were provided. It had been considered that the level of difficulty and the familiarity of the song was suitable to the learners’ age and their proficiency level.

Procedures

Before the learners began the treatment, they were required to listen to the selected song four to five times until they memorize the lyrics. Then, they were asked to create an account in Smule-sing! karaoke app. Afterward, they sing the song along with the music once or several times through Smule-sing! karaoke app. Their voice was recorded automatically in the recording list. The recording song was collected by the researchers to be evaluated. In the end, the learners were given the questionnaire electronically to evaluate their learning experience.

Results and Discussion

The Perception Guiding Variables

To answer the questions of this study, the researcher used a percentage formula to show the result after students filled the questionnaire. These four variables were expected to guide the students' evaluation regarding the correlation between the online music method and the students' learning experience, the benefits for gaining pronunciation skills after utilizing a karaoke app, and limitations when enhancing the student's pronunciation by utilizing a karaoke app.

Table 1. Correlation between the frequency and the easiness of utilizing a karaoke app to their learning experience

Questions	A		B		C	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. How many times did you listen to the song before answering the question on this page?	15	50%	6	20%	9	30%
2. How much did you like the song?	9	30%	21	70%	0	0
3. How easy for you to understand the words of the song?	0	0	18	60%	12	40%
4. How easy was it to learn pronunciation using a karaoke app?	6	20%	24	80%	0	0
5. For the amount of time you spent on it, how many words or phrases did you learn for having a good pronunciation after using a karaoke app?	3	10%	18	60%	9	30%

The result of table 1 showed that half of the participants had listened to the original song at least one to three times. There were 70% of the students who liked the chosen song. Meanwhile, 60% of the students felt easy to understand the words of the song. On the other hand, 80% of the students felt easy to pronounce every word found in the running texts. After utilizing the online music method, 60% of the students perceived that they had learned a significant number of words and phrases for having a good pronunciation.

Pronunciation Areas

Table 2 showed whether the effect of treatment by utilizing a karaoke app helped them enhance pronunciation skills.

Table 2. The effect of a karaoke app on their pronunciation skills

Statement	SA		A		UD		DA		SDA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. I think that using a karaoke app helps me to improve my pronunciation.	9	30%	12	40%	6	20%	3	10%	0	0
2. I think that using a karaoke app helps me understand how to make a suitable intonation pattern.	6	20%	15	50%	3	10%	6	20%	0	0
3. I think that using a karaoke app helps me how to make stress and rhythm.	6	20%	9	30%	9	30%	6	20%	0	0

4. I think that using a karaoke app helps me to distinguish difficult sounds.	6	20%	9	30%	9	30%	6	20%	0	0
TOTAL		22,5%		37,5%		22,5%		17,5%		0

There are 37,5% of the students who chose to agree that the use of a karaoke app can improve their pronunciation skills including the skill to make a suitable intonation pattern, stress, and rhythm, and to distinguish difficult sounds during singing activity. The other students choose strongly agree and undecided agree and the least number choose to disagree indicating a karaoke app does not help students to enhance their pronunciation skills.

Advantages

Four statements in the questionnaire explored the advantages of EFL college students' learning experience after listening and singing practices through utilizing a karaoke app.

Table 3. The advantages on EFL college students' learning experience after utilizing a karaoke app

Statement	SA		A		UD		DA		SDA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. I find singing through a karaoke app is interesting and useful to learn the pronunciation	9	30%	12	40%	6	20%	3	10%	0	0
2. I like using a karaoke app to learn pronunciation because I can work according to my own pace.	6	20%	21	70%	3	10%	0	0	0	0
3. Using a karaoke app is effective to improve my pronunciation skill	3	10%	18	60%	9	30%	0	0	0	0
4. I benefit from the feedback given by a karaoke app rehearsal.	0	0	18	60%	12	40%	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		15%		57,5%		25%		2,5%		0

As shown in Table 3, four important advantages were reported. More than half of the students chose to agree with the statements. Students felt having more benefits when they used a karaoke app to learn English pronunciation. A karaoke app was very useful to learn English pronunciation, could be used in their leisure time, could improve their pronunciation skill, and provided them useful feedback.

Limitations

Nine statements were allotted to address the component of the limitations on EFL college students' learning experience after utilizing a karaoke app.

Table 4. The limitations and problems on EFL college students' learning experience after utilizing a karaoke app

Statement	SA		A		UD		DA		SDA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. The song's melody is too fast or too slow.	3	10%	15	50%	9	30%	3	10%	0	0
2. I have never listened to the song before.	0	0	0	0	3	10%	21	70%	6	20%

3. There is a lot of unfamiliar sounds which is different from my native language.	0	0	15	50%	9	30%	3	10%	3	10%
4. Singing skill is a major problem I face when using a karaoke app to learn pronunciation.	0	0	3	10%	18	60%	9	30%	0	0
TOTAL		2,5%		27,5%		32,5%		30%		7,5%

The result showed that there were 32,5% of the students remained neutral. Some of them could not decide whether the song's melody, the unfamiliarity to the songs, the differences sounds between English and their mother tongue and so do the music skill be the problems. It was followed by the second dominant percentage which addressed to disagree the options indicating the students did not feel those statements as problems.

Table 2 explained the second question of the study by presenting pronunciation skills. In this table, the students believed that they gained benefits after utilizing a karaoke app. The high level of agreements determined a suitable intonation pattern accounted for the relations between melody and intonation. The other positive response showed that a karaoke app helped them to improve their pronunciation at the same time. The two last other aspects believed that it could not help them to make stress and rhythm or distinguish the sounds while singing along with the song. This indicated that those aspects could not be learned easily only by using a karaoke app. The students needed to learn deeper not only by using a karaoke app but also by involving many sources such as a dictionary or reading out a loud strategy to familiarize themselves with certain types of sounds. These findings could be related to Farmand¹ & Pourgharib² (2013) dan Arjomad et al. (2015) who conducted the same study in the relations between music and pronunciation field.

Table 1 answered the first question of the study by presenting the correlation among the frequency, easiness, and the students' learning experience by utilizing a karaoke app. The result showed that the frequency and the easiness had a positive influence on EFL college students' learning experience. This indicated that the song options were taken into consideration to draw the students' attention to learn English pronunciation. The song should be familiar and contains linguistic's elements that could help students to improve their pronunciation skills.

Furthermore, the data presented in Table 3 explained the advantages of utilizing a karaoke app. The effective use of time certainly aided the students in adjusting the learning activity to their spare time. They could apply this learning approach when they were free from the other activities. The effectiveness of utilizing a karaoke app and the given feedback had improved their pronunciation at the same time appeared to approve the importance of utilizing technology in the students' autonomous learning. The other advantages emphasized that utilizing a karaoke app was very useful and interesting. In addition, this aspect could motivate EFL college students to use music and a karaoke app as a medium of learning pronunciation should be familiar and contains linguistic's elements that could help students to improve their pronunciation skills.

Moreover, this study explored the limitations and problems after utilizing a karaoke app in learning English pronunciation. Four statements were presented in this category and the students were requested to give their responses based on their experience after receiving treatment. From the four statements stated above, the melody's rate of the song and the unfamiliarity to the sounds which were significantly different from their native language became the major concerns among the students. Since the students were non-native speakers, it became difficult for them to sing along with the song even though they had heard the original song several times. The difficulty of the song was one of the most intriguing findings which should be adjusted to their English proficiency level. They found difficulty when the song run

too fast. The unfamiliarity with the tune was a possibility to issue. Since they had listened to the song before conducting the treatment, music skills did not consider as a great deal to feel under pressure on learning English pronunciation.

Conclusion

Utilizing a karaoke app is considered as the one learning approach that assisted EFL college students to improve their pronunciation skills. The present study contributed to the benefit of listening and singing activity by using 'Smule-sing!' karaoke app for EFL college students. It is necessary to be noted that the participants in this study consistently gain the advantages of this experience in enhancing their pronunciation skills. Moreover, the advantages clearly explain how the use of a karaoke app can be used effectively in their leisure time. However, this learning approach could be considered as a design for a new teaching instruction to teach pronunciation skills. The limitations and problems were identified for controlling the selection of the song in consideration that not all the songs could be used to teach pronunciation elements. Based on the limitations, it is suggested for further research to conduct research by using different types of songs that can teach overall pronunciation.

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