Enhancing Final Consonant Pronunciation Skill of the First Year Students at Nakhonratchasima Rajabhat University through E-learning
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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate whether final consonant E-learning package can enhance first year NRRU students’ pronunciation skill and to find out the students’ opinions regarding using final consonant E-learning package. The subjects of this study were thirty five undergraduate first year non-English major students of the academic year 2010 who were studying English Fundamental 1 subject at NRRU. The subjects’ majors were sciences, arts and special education. The researcher employed the communicative approach according to Antony (1963) and Nunan (2001) as a learning theory and research methodology. Furthermore, the researcher used the process of developing the E-learning package adapted from Alessi and Trollip (2001). The results of this research showed that the final consonants pre-and post-tests mean scores were statistically significant at a level of 0.05 and the subjects’ opinions toward the final consonant E-learning package were positive.

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1. Introduction

Pronunciation skill is well recognized as one of the major issues of many foreign language learners. Even students in university level who have studied English for many years still have problems in pronouncing English words. A question arisen is how language teachers can improve their students’ pronunciation skill especially in pronouncing final consonant correctly.

A study from ministry of higher education (1999) found that most Thai students in higher education still have pronunciation problem in communication. This study shows that Thai students can communicate well only 4.8%, communicate fairly 32.9 %, and communicate a little 37% but 25.3% of the students cannot communicate at all. This may the result of a history of ineffective English teaching in the classrooms. Some teachers may teach only grammar and vocabularies. Pronunciation practice may not be concerning much due to a limited time in the classroom setting.

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Furthermore, many students in Thailand have English pronunciation problems which may affect their capacity for learning English. Also if the students are unable to pronounce words correctly, this may lead to misunderstanding. According to Youfu & Yalun (2002) indicated that mispronunciation can lessen listening comprehension ability.

Electronics learning (E-learning) is wildly used nowadays in helping teachers train their students for a specific need. E-learning has appeared in many forms but computer is mainly used in E-learning. The examples of E-learning derived through Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) and Computer Assisted Language learning (CALL). CAI is used for variety purposes in any subject. However, CALL is widely used for enhancing language learning. CALL is defined as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p.1). The main aim of CALL is to find ways for the teaching and learning of language. To be more specific, CALL is represented by the use of computer technology to promote learning via computer programs such as word processing, presentation packages, guided drills and practice, tutorials, games and simulations, multimedia CD-ROMs, and internet applications such as e-mail, chat, and World Wide Web (WWW) for language learning purposes. Therefore, CALL would be employed to enhance Thai students’ final consonant pronunciation skill. Research on E-learning through CALL showed significant gain for learners’ pronunciation practice such as Sohrabie (2008). CALL software is effective in promoting language learning according to the finding of the following research.

In academic year 2010, more than half of the total numbers of new students at Nakhonratchasima Rajabhat University (NRRU) were low English proficiency students according to their English placement test. It is assumed that most students have a limited English background. Due to their limited proficiency in English, the students have potential problem in learning English, especially in speaking skill. After reviewing English foundation I syllabus, the curriculum generally aimed at preparing the students for four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The course comprise only lecture in the class room without tutorial. This might be the reason why the students lack of pronunciation training. Hence, there is a need for pronunciation training and support that can assist students to develop the language learning.

In conclusion, from previous study also shows that Thai university students could enhance their pronunciation skill by being trained to pronounce English words correctly. Also, as E-learning is an effective teaching tool nowadays it would be interesting to see its effectiveness in promoting language learning.

2. Purposes of the study

The present study investigated whether the final consonant E-learning package could enhance the first year NRRU students’ pronunciation skill and to find out the students’ opinions regarding using the final consonant E-learning package.

3. Methodology

The 35 subjects of this study were the first year students studying the subject (150011) English Foundation 1 at Nakhonratchasima Rajabhat University in the second semester of academic year 2010. This sixteen-week English subject is conducted from November 1st 2010 to February 17th 2011. All of the subjects finished high school and their majors were sciences, arts and special education. The subjects were required to do final consonant pre-test before the experiment which asked them to pronounce 25 words that consisted of the seven categories of English final consonants. Then they practiced with E-learning pronunciation package for fourteen weeks. After that, they were required to do the final consonant post-test and the questionnaire after the experiment.
3.1 Research Instruments

In this study, the research instruments were consisted of the E-learning pronunciation package, the final consonant pre-test and post-test and the questionnaire. The following sections explained each research instrument in detail.

3.1.1 The Final Consonant E-learning Package

The final consonant E-learning package consisting of 7 exercises was employed in this study. The seven exercises were base on a relative degree of difficulty found in the pretest. The processes of making the E-learning pronunciation package, the researcher followed three main stages of: planning; design; and development as adapted from Alessi & Trolip (2001) that consisted of the following ten steps.

**Stage I: Planning**

The first stage is planning which consisted of three steps. 1) The fist step is to define the scope. In this step the researcher determined goals and objectives of the final consonant E-learning package. The learning goals and objectives were determined, including general and performance objectives, learning strategies, the initial activities, supplementary exercise and tests. The researcher also specified the scope of the final consonant E-learning package according to the course syllabus for English Foundation I. 2) The second step is to identify learner characteristics. The researcher studied the target learners' background in advance in order to respond to the learners' needs. The learners' characteristics included: age, educational level, motivation, prerequisite language skills, facility with a computer, access to computers and time availability. In order to do this the researcher produced a learner characteristics chart and the target groups of learners were those who fulfilled all the requirements. 3) The third step is to select and collect resources. In this step relevant information resources were collected and made ready for each lesson. The researcher ensured that the materials for content, instructional development and an instructional delivery system such as a computer program were ready. The resources were selected and collected.

**Stage II: Design**

The second stage is design which consists of three steps. 4) The fourth step is to develop initial content ideas. In this step of the process, the researcher determined the form and characteristics of the instruction by firstly elimination of ideas. Repeated or impossible ideas were eliminated and the most useful ideas were identified for reconsideration. Secondly, task and concept analysis process was done. The researcher analyzed the tasks and potential content that the students would study until the final content was refined. Thirdly, a preliminary description of the lesson was produced. Lastly, evaluation and revision of the design was carried out in order to have a systematic program of instruction. 5) The fifth step in this stage is to create flowcharts. In this step, a flow chart was developed. The flowchart shows how the learners’ process can continue smoothly and at the same time improve the learners’ interest and knowledge. 6) The sixth step is to create the storyboard. In this step, the lesson contents were displayed as images for each frame on paper in order to present the lesson content in multiple forms on the computer screen. In this process the lesson content on the storyboard was evaluated and revised until it was considered satisfactory. A word processor was used to write the primary text. The information was arranged in lists when appropriate. In this step the storyboard was reviewed and scripts were prepared.

**Stage III: Development**

The third stage is development which consists of four steps. 7) The seventh step is to prepare media. This step included the researcher typed the texts using Microsoft Word. Audio was recorded or edited using Sound Forge V.7. 8) The eighth step is to program the exercise. At this stage, the storyboard was shifted into the CALL program using the storyboard on paper and later ready to be produced the final consonant E-learning. 9) The ninth step is to carry out an alpha test. In alpha testing the researcher, the programmer and experts tests the final
consonant E-learning package using an evaluation form which check look and feel; style and conventions; and to check forms. 10) The tenth step is to revise material. After doing an Alpha test, the information from the evaluation form were used to revise the final consonant E-learning package.

3.1.2 The final consonant pre-test and post-test

The final consonant pre-test and the final consonant post-test were 25 words that the students have final pronunciation problem. The two tests were the same test.

3.1.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of ten questions each with five rating scales. Likert’s rating scale was used to construct the questionnaire’s 5 points. The scale categories was assigned designed numeric values, from 5 which means (“I mostly agree”) to 1 which means (I do not agree at all”) (See Peterson, 2000).

3.2 The Research Design

The research design was used in the present study was a Single-group-Pretest-Posttest (Nunan, 2001). The research design can be illustrated as follows:

Experimental Design:

Pretest   Treatment   Posttest

4. Data Collection and Data analysis

4.1 Data Collection

The data was collected with the following procedure:

1. The subjects given a final consonant pre-test designed as an oral test on November 4th 2010. They were told to read the word lists into a microphone which connected to a computer. They had a three-second pause between words. After the test, the researcher marked the test by listening to the sound recorded and marked the scores of each subject. The scales for marking were accurate, inaccurate and doubtful. The subjects received one mark when they had correct pronunciation.

2. The subjects practiced final consonant pronunciation skill with the E-learning pronunciation package. The duration of practicing was fourteen weeks from November 11th 2010 to February 10th 2011. The subjects had two weeks to practice each exercise. They practiced two hours together in the classroom and they had a copy of the package to practice at their convenience time at home.

3. The subjects were as to do the final consonant post-test after finishing all the practices. The post-test was the same as the pre-test. The test was on February 11th 2011.

4.2 Data Analysis

The statistical analyses employed to process of the data collection in the present study were as follows. First, the mean scores and standard deviation (S.D.) of the final consonant pre-test and post-test were used to measure the progression of the participants. Second a t-test was used to test the significance of differences between the final consonant pre-test, and the post-test scores. Third, the data from the questionnaire were calculated as mean scores to find out the subjects’ opinions.
5. Results of the Study

5.1 The Result of the final consonant pronunciation tests

In this section, the scores of final consonant pronunciation tests are presented. The improvement of the subject final consonant pronunciation skill is represented by mean score and the result of t-test as showed in Table 1.

| Test     | Mean scores | t Stat |
|----------|-------------|--------|
| Pre-test | 8.800       | 15.631** |
| Post-test| 16.571      |        |

This study was conducted to find out the effect of the final consonant E-learning package on the subjects’ final consonant pronunciation skill. The scores of the pre-test and post-test were used to compare and find out its’ significant using t-test. The results of the study showed that the participants post-test scores were significantly different from the pre-test score at a level of 0.05 as shown in table 1. It means that the final consonant E-learning package could enhance students’ pronunciation skill.

5.2 The Results of the Subjects’ Opinion from the Questionnaire

In this section the results from the questionnaire which aim at surveying the subjects’ opinion toward the final consonant E-learning package were presented as shown in table 2.

| Items | Content                                                                 | Average | Meaning |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| 1     | Good pronunciation gives me more confidence in communicate with foreigner.| 4.17    | High    |
| 2     | I need good English pronunciation.                                        | 4.31    | High    |
| 3     | Correct pronunciation can be practiced by learning systematically.        | 4.23    | High    |
| 4     | Pronunciation is useful in learning English.                             | 4.11    | High    |
| 5     | Pronunciation should be taught in every communicative English classroom. | 4.03    | High    |
| 6     | Correct pronunciation will be useful for me in the future.               | 4.26    | High    |
| 7     | Practicing pronunciation using electronic media is convenient.           | 4.11    | High    |
| 8     | This electronic pronunciation package helps me improve speaking skill.   | 4.14    | High    |
| 9     | This electronic pronunciation package is suitable my ability.             | 3.94    | High    |
| 10    | This electronic pronunciation package allows me to practice at my convenience. | 4.14    | High    |

As shown in Table 2, the subjects were satisfied with the final consonant E-learning package with the average of 4.15. All items were marked in “High” levels. This indicated that the subjects had positive opinion toward the final consonant E-learning package which similar to the previous studies of Saranthorn, (1996), Namphadorn, (2007), Suwannabubpha, (2006) and Sohrabie (2008).
6. Conclusions

The present study investigated the effectiveness of using final consonant E-learning package on the first year NRRU students’ pronunciation skill and to find out their opinions regarding the final consonant E-learning package.

The 35 subjects were the first year students who were studying the (150011) English foundation 1 at Nakhonratchasima Rajabhat University. The subjects were required to do the final consonant pre-test before the experiment. Then, the subjects pronounced 25 words that consisted of the seven categories of English final consonants. Then they practiced through E-learning for fourteen weeks. They were asked to do the final pronunciation post-test after the experiment completed.

The results of the study showed that the subjects’ final pronunciation post-test scores are significantly different from (higher than) the final pronunciation pre-test score. That means the final consonant E-learning package could enhance students’ pronunciation skill. Also, the result from the questionnaire showed that every item falls in the “high” level of agreement. This indicated that the subjects had positive opinion toward the final consonant E-learning package which similar to the previous studies.

7. Limitations of the study

Although the current study reveals that training students’ final pronunciation using E-learning can assist student’s final consonants pronunciation skill, it has some limitations in interpretation of the study’s results concerning the students’ backgrounds and the research data collection methods. Thus, the results from the training in final consonant using E-learning in this study need to be used with consideration of other factors that may impact upon students’ final consonant pronunciation skill in different groups and settings.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the results of this study are proposed for future research. Firstly, similar research should be conducted with students at other levels of English language ability. They may have various or different problems and need different levels of final consonant instructional training. Secondly, the development of other CALL final consonant E-learning package in comparative study with two groups of students (i.e. control and experimental group) should be conducted to find out the E-learning’ effectiveness using other form of research design. Thirdly, the comparative study of the final consonant pronunciation skill of students who practice through CAI lesson in a computer lab with a limited time of study and who practice with no time limit should be constructed to find out the most suitable time and way to improve students’ pronunciation skill.

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