Advantages and disadvantages of learning pronunciation in MS Teams classes: Perceptions of English-majored students at Van Hien University

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Abstract

Online classes have become important for all subjects, including pronunciation, because of the rapid advancements in science and technology, particularly during the Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 pandemic. However, Vietnam has produced only a small number of research articles on the advantages and disadvantages of online English pronunciation classes. Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of examining how English-majored students at Van Hien University perceived the advantages and disadvantages of learning pronunciation in MS Teams classes. The online survey method via Google form was used to collect data from students of three English pronunciation classes at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Hien University and received 131 valid answer sheets, of which selecting five students continued to participate in semi-structured interviews via telephone. The findings demonstrate that the benefits of class recordings were undeniable. On the contrary, in addition to technical concerns, students encountered other obstacles, such as learning environment issues and lack of direct contact.

Keywords: *lack of direct contact, learning environment, learning pronunciation, MS Teams classes, technical issues*

1. Background and rationale

Due to the crumble of the whole educational system from elementary to higher levels during Covid-19 lockdowns and the result of technological development in the last few decades, a vast transformation in the academic format has occurred: from traditional or face-to-face classrooms to computer-based or synchronous classrooms (teacher and students study online at the same time). This educational shift is considered to play a significant role in the changing process of English language teaching and learning. English learning in general and English pronunciation learning have been transformed from traditional methods to online learning via supporting software, such as MS Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet, which is more convenient than ever. Although lecturers and students still encounter several obstacles when attempting pronunciation classes in MS Teams, few studies on learning English pronunciation in synchronous online classes have been conducted in Vietnam and around the world. This research aims to describe the perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of learning English pronunciation in MS Teams classes from the perspectives of those who directly experience it in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Hien University. The findings of the study have some

implications for promoting the advantages and overcoming the disadvantages of this mode of pronunciation learning. Research on this topic is necessary, particularly for those majoring in education who plan to pursue teaching as a career for the foreseeable future.

2. Literature review

2.1. The roles of technology in improving English pronunciation

The academic world, especially learning systems and methods, has transformed dramatically under the influence of technological development (Aditama and Sugiharto, 2021). Williams (2016) claims that technology has been playing a vital role in the teaching and learning English language process. Therefore, platforms such as Blackboard, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and Canvas are beneficial for creating classes and other development programs (Ellis, 2009). Additionally, the trend of employing computing in teaching is rising to improve the quality of English pronunciation (Haghighi and Rahimy, 2017; Gilakjani, 2016b; Sadeghi and Mashhadi, 2016). According to Yangklang (2013), individual students' autonomy may be promoted by using a computer-based program, and it is an excellent technique to increase pronunciation skills. Another problem is that today's digital technology and language learning systems, according to Blin (1999), are not yet cognitive enough to be genuinely interactive with students as a teacher is.

2.2. The significance of pronunciation

Most educators and language learners now believe that clear and specific pronunciation teaching is indispensable, and a prioritized part of language classes and impoverished pronunciation can conceal otherwise good language skills, denouncing learners to less than their deserved social, scholarly, and professional advancement (Fraser and Perth, 1999). Brekelmans (2017) also declares that poor pronunciation could negatively affect learners' communication effectiveness. Additionally, it is progressively acknowledged as an important skill for language learners (Rossiter et al., 2010).

Despite its essential values, the fact is that pronunciation is looked down on in classes (Rubrecht, 2016). Farhat and Dzakiria (2017), Baker (2014), Baker and Murphy (2011) claimed that pronunciation in English has received insufficient attention, and no significant attempt has been made to recognize the importance of this vital talent, although further research has pointed out that pronunciation in English is one of the most difficult abilities to master (Haghighi and Rahimy, 2017; Gilakjani, 2016a; Sadeghi and Mashhadi, 2016), and students should devote a significant amount of time to improving it (Gilakjani, 2016a). However, even when learning a language online, the significance of pronunciation still attracts little attention, whereas the computer-assisted language learning format focuses primarily on vocabulary or grammar (Chappelle, 2001).

2.3. Advantages of learning pronunciation online

In the academic world, learning systems and methods have transformed dramatically under the influence of technological development (Aditama and Sugiharto, 2021). Universities around the world are now applying many different forms of teaching pronunciation online, using different technologies. A good

example is Muhammadiyah Surakarta University, which employs Hypermedia systems, computer-based multimedia systems that offer interactive and link-based navigation that enable the material in digital form (Aditama and Sugiharto, 2021). Another university in Thailand used the Schoology platform, along with some materials taken from YouTube, Quizlet, and FlipGrid, to teach pronunciation during the pandemic (Dennis, 2021). Akhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University also applies technology to teaching through the students' pronunciation analysis platform (Yangklang, 2013). Briefly, the teaching-learning pronunciation format has been transformed to online, although universities use different technologies in this process.

According to Al-Qudah's research (2012), employing computer-assisted applications rather than written materials to instruct students in English pronunciation improves students' performance. Thanks to the use of computers, students may examine the lecturer's mouth shapes and tongue positions, receive aural and visual feedback and make corrections on their own without the lecturer's reprimands (Farhat and Dzakiria, 2017). Because the usage of E-learning programs can assist each student's autonomous study, Yangklang (2013) claims that employing a computer-based program, which was a program analyzing students' pronunciation, might help to increase the autonomy of individual students. Based on the findings of his study, which showed that most of the students achieved higher scores in word stress and intonation placement, he further asserts that it is a great method for improving pronunciation abilities. According to Baralt and Morcillo (2017), with computer-

assisted pronunciation training, learners can choose only to complete the training that specifically addresses their unique pronunciation issues, allowing for more individualized instruction. Moreover, working with class recordings is also a brand-new benefit. Recordings, which can be listened to accurately, without modification, are critical for students and professors (Gilakjani et al., 2011). In general, these universities apply many methods to teaching and learning pronunciation, but there is no form of teaching and learning in MS Teams classes similar to the form of Van Hien University.

2.4. Disadvantages of learning pronunciation online

Dependence on technology is unavoidable when learning online. Access restrictions and support restrictions are referred to as challenges to class technology (Dennis, 2021). Husaj (2020) states that a robust Internet connection is vital, typically in the setting of online learning. The class participants may immediately be detrimental by the weak and low bandwidth. In addition, Nguyen (2020) claims that the teaching and learning quality may be negatively impacted by a shaky Internet connection on either side.

Another major issue is the students' and lecturers' lack of interaction. Deutschmann et al. (2009) indicated that oral proficiency is the ability that is most adversely affected by the lack of natural interaction in online settings. In addition, Pham et al. (2021) found out that learning pronunciation involves much interaction between students and lecturer, as well as among students, but Internet learning has minimized this.

As another issue was raised, Nguyen (2020) claims that even though there is

lecturer-student interaction in an online class, it is possible for students to become easily distracted by their surroundings. Lessons may be disrupted if lecturers are unable to regulate background noise from their students.

In short, computer-based learning has many benefits, for instance, guiding students in English pronunciation without the use of written materials, increasing student autonomy, and enabling more individualized training through video recordings. However, there are still research gaps which are very little research on teaching pronunciation in online classes, especially the research on the advantages and disadvantages of this learning form.

Few studies on learning English pronunciation online have been conducted in Vietnam. This research topic aims to comprehend students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of learning English pronunciation in MS Teams classes, specifically from the perspectives of those who directly experience it in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Hien University, to propose solutions to overcome the disadvantages of this kind of class.

To achieve the research purpose, the research will answer the following questions:

How do Van Hien University's English-majored students perceive the advantages of learning English pronunciation in MS Teams classes?

How do Van Hien University's English-majored students perceive the disadvantages of learning English pronunciation in MS Teams classes?

3. Research methodology
3.1. Data collection

To examine student perceptions of learning pronunciation via MS Teams, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was conducted. A quantitative technique was utilized to obtain data on the general tendency in Van Hien University's English-majored students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of learning pronunciation in MS Teams classes. Students' views and perceptions will be collected in large numbers, more readily and rapidly, using a Google form-based questionnaire. Following the collection of many responses using the questionnaire, a qualitative approach will be used to collect additional comprehensive material from five students by interviewing via telephone to explain the findings from the questionnaire.

The research was carried out at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Hien University, Ho Chi Minh City. Currently, the university's Faculty of Foreign Languages consists of two majors: Chinese and English Language Studies. The data collected from students for this topic came from students majoring in English linguistics by sending survey link. Data were gathered from 131 of about 150 students who participated in the three online English pronunciation classes in MS Teams at Van Hien University at the time the research was being carried out.

The questionnaire of online survey was designed in Vietnamese with the process according to Zhong and Ouyang (2010); Bell and Waters (2018). The questions were based on using the findings of earlier research. There are two clusters in the questionnaire: "The advantages of learning English pronunciation through MS Teams classes" with four items (Farhat and Dzakiria, 2017; Gilakjani et al., 2011) and "the disadvantages of learning English

pronunciation through MS Teams classes" with four items (Deutschmann et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2020; Pham et al., 2021). Moreover, to investigate intensively about negative effects of their online learning English pronunciation process, a last open-ended question on the downsides of studying English pronunciation online was included at the end of the questionnaire. Questions for the scales were designed first to measure the variables, then edited following experts' advice, and tested with five participants before submitting the survey online.

In qualitative research, a semi-structured interview was employed to corroborate the quantitative research results with additional in-depth information about the disadvantages of online learning English pronunciation. This questionnaire is based on reality, no questions from previous studies were used. The questions were created in accordance with the ideas presented in the literature review, as well as with the answers collected from the open question in the questionnaire of online survey. There are many ways to protect participants' perceptions from bias while also bolstering the validity and reliability of qualitative research. For instance, researchers can use a variety of tools to collect data, check for meaningful consistency when the same question is asked by different people, rewrite participant-generated questions, record personal thoughts while conducting observations and interviews, etc. (Fraenkel et al., 2012). To ensure that all the participants understood a question the same way, strategies included asking sub-questions, and recording audio was used to ensure that the questions were stated clearly,

and no comments were missed.

Five students were selected to participate in in-depth interviews via telephone and coded with three female (F1, F2 and F3) and two males (M1 and M2). The interviewees answered their own perceptions and concerns when being asked several semi-structured questions about the advantages and disadvantages of learning English pronunciation online.

3.2. Data analysis

The information was transferred from Google Forms to IBM® Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The cases were coded, recoded, and no missing or duplicate cases were found using this method, resulting in a total of 131 cases being gathered for descriptive statistical analysis.

The five-point Likert scale was used in the question design to represent how much they agreed or disagreed with it (1: Totally disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Totally agree).

Cronbach's alpha index was used to evaluate the validity of each scale in the questionnaire. The questions that caused the alpha index to be low were systematically deleted until the necessary values were obtained, ensuring that each scale still had at least three questions when Cronbach's alpha index did not meet the minimum value of 0.7.

The interview data was recorded for analysis later. To identify more deeply these students' perceptions and concerns, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken. This is a method used to objectively, systematically describe words, concepts, or topics in data (Berelson, 1952). According to Duriau et al. (2007), scalability, cost-effectiveness, and replicability are benefits of

the content analysis methodology. Through this analysis technique, the content and messages of the interviewees can be found.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptions of participants

It can be observed that the number of freshmen was the majority at 74%. They were 97 freshmen majoring in English pronunciation classes in MS Teams. In contrast, third-year students make up only 6% of the participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptions of participants

Total number of participants	Participants' information		
	Year	Number of participants	Percentage
131	1	97	74%
	2	12	9%
	3	8	6%
	4	14	11%

4.2. The perceived advantages of learning English pronunciation in online classes

The part of the survey for this scale consisted of four items, and the value for Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = 0.861 > 0.7$, so the scale was reliable (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability of the scale "The perceived advantages of learning English pronunciation in online classes"

Cronbach's alpha	Number of items	Questions
0.861	4	1. Class recordings help you re-listen to the pronunciation of the lecturers that you missed many times.
		2. Class recordings help you find out your pronunciation errors.
		3. Class recordings help you to avoid repeating the same pronunciation mistakes.
		4. Class recordings help you compare your pronunciation to the lecturers'.

The means of four items were above 4.2 (Table 3), which indicated a general agreement toward the advantages of learning English pronunciation via MS Teams.

The first four questions show that class recordings were helpful for students in an English pronunciation course. First and foremost, most students thought that the class recordings helped them find their pronunciation errors, and class recordings helped them compare their pronunciation to the lecturer's model. This is a positive result since students cannot easily re-listen or re-watch the course in offline courses, especially the English pronunciation course.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the perceived advantages of learning English pronunciation online (N=131)

Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Class recordings help you listen to the pronunciation you missed in class	4.40	0.85
2. Class recordings help you find out your pronunciation errors.	4.29	0.85
3. Class recordings help you to avoid repeating the same pronunciation mistakes.	4.35	0.76
4. Class recordings help you compare your pronunciation to the lecturers'.	4.46	0.74
Valid N	4.37	0.80

The results of these questions show that many students are enthusiastic about the advantage of this learning format, with an emphasis on the after-class video recordings. The majority of students rely on video recordings to monitor, identify, and correct pronunciation faults. This supports the view of Gilakjani et al. (2011) that it is vital for students and lecturers to engage with recordings so that they can listen to the pronunciation precisely, without modification.

4.3. The perceived disadvantages of learning English pronunciation in online

The value for Cronbach's Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.824 > 0.7 so the scale was reliable (Table 4).

Table 4. Reliability of the scale "The perceived disadvantages of learning English pronunciation in online classes"

Cronbach's alpha	Number of items	Questions
0.824	4	5. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of interactions between lecturers and students
		6. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of pronunciation correction from lecturers
		7. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of interactions among classmates
		8. The surrounding noise affects your learning pronunciation online process.

Generally, the means of four items were just above 3.0 slightly (Table 5). This revealed that there was a neutrality of the opinions on the disadvantages of learning English pronunciation through MS. Teams mentioned in the questionnaire. Participants did not consider the experience of using application and transformation of learning format as a disadvantage.

Regarding the level of interaction in Questions 5 and 7, in general, the students slightly disagreed that there is a lack of interactions between lecturers and students, with a mean of 2.8. The level of interactions among students in the class had a mean of 3.13. This result seemed neutral, so it was examined more clearly later in the interview.

Regarding the teacher's correction, a part of the students disagreed with the view that their lecturer did not focus on correcting their pronunciation, with a mean of 2.55. This is a good sign because correcting students' pronunciation is vital in every pronunciation class, no matter if it is carried out traditionally or via the Internet.

As for ambient noise (Question 8), on the other hand, ambient noise was chosen to be one of the most influential factors affecting the learning process, with a value of 3.9. This result showed that noise is problematic since it can be disruptive and distracting when learning, especially when learning pronunciation online

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the perceived disadvantages of learning English pronunciation online (N=131)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of interactions between lecturers and students.	2.80	1.34
6. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of pronunciation correction from lecturers.	2.55	1.31
7. When learning pronunciation via MS Teams, there is a lack of interaction among classmates.	3.13	1.30
8. The surrounding noise affects your learning pronunciation online process.	3.90	1.08
Valid N	3.09	1.25

4.4. Qualitative results

With a last open-ended question on the downsides of studying English pronunciation online, 74 responses were collected; 14 inappropriate answers, such as "I have no answer", were excluded. Therefore, these responses are systemized and classified into categories with 60 appropriate responses (n=60).

The factors the students claimed negatively affect their online learning English pronunciation process could be categorized into three groups: technical issues, including unstable Internet connection and limited resources; learning environment issues, including noise and a lack of the teacher's supervision; and a lack of direct contact.

Looking at the technical issues, the majority of students confessed that an unstable Internet connection was the most influential one, making up nearly 45% of participants' answers. Around 12% of the participants mentioned limited resources. 3% of students also admitted power cut-off as one of the technical issues.

Additionally, noise as a learning environment issue was ranked second, with almost 20% of students agreeing. Typically, learning in an environment where teacher supervision did not exist could create chances for students to engage in distracting resources. To illustrate this issue, social media and other priorities were mentioned by 3% of the participants to be also the factors affecting their joining lectures process (Table 6).

Table 6. Limitations of learning via MS Teams

	Factors	Number of answers (N=60)
1.	Unstable Internet connection	27 (45%)
2.	Ambient noise	12 (20%)
3.	Limited resources	7 (12%)
4.	Inability to observe lecturer's mouth shape	3 (5%)
5.	Students' interior problems (difficult to understand lessons, unable to focus)	3 (5%)
6.	Power cut off	2 (3%)
7.	Other priorities	2 (3%)
8.	Social media	2 (3%)
9.	Lack of interactions	1 (2%)
10.	Amount of the knowledge	1 (2%)

Interviews were conducted with five participants: three female (F1, F2 and F3) and two male (M1 and M2) students. The responses were also divided into three groups: technical issues, learning environment issues and a lack of direct contact.

Considering technical issues, four out of five interviewees (F1, F3, M1 and M2) had the same response "*the Internet connection and limited resources such as low-quality speakers, slow-paced learning devices, and etc. Nevertheless, one of the participants rarely experienced an unstable Internet connection*" (F2). Nevertheless, when they were asked if the Internet connection and other technological issues were the only problems, all of them denied it. All these answers were the same as the responses obtained from the open-ended question. 45% of students claimed that they had Internet problems, making it difficult for them to interact and follow the lessons. Poor and low bandwidth can cause immediate harm to class participants, so a reliable Internet connection is essential, especially in the context of online learning

(Husaj, 2020; Nguyen, 2020).

Next, questions about learning environment issues were raised. The answers showed the same result as the open-ended question and provided more details. All the students admitted that ambient noises were totally distracting. Some of those noises came from their living environments (F1, F2, F3, M1 and M2) and some came from the lecturer's (F2). They were annoying and made them unable to concentrate on the lesson and understand what was delivered by the teacher. Noise becomes one of the most serious issues that students confront, which is compatible with there was a possibility that students were easily distracted by outside noises (Nguyen, 2020). Regarding the learning environment that lacked teacher's supervision, it was confessed to be one of the most serious disadvantages. Specially, the students admitted that they were distracted by social media because there was no one to observe them and they relied on the available after-class recordings. Consequently, they were tempted to be unfocused on the lessons (F1, F3 and M2).

Moving to the lack of direct contact, most of the participants showed their satisfaction with the level of lecturer-student interaction. F1 and F2 stated that the lecturer always asked them to engage in the lesson by posing questions and assigning tasks. The lecturer was praised for connecting with students effectively by asking questions and offering activities by most of the students, which is a positive sign. This result is opposite to Pham et al. (2021) findings, which claimed that online learning lowered the levels of interactions between teachers and students. On the other hand, the interactions among the students

received many complaints because some students were quiet and shy to communicate (F3). When there is no direct contact, students might lose their motivation and enthusiasm to learn pronunciation. The reasons were that students had expected to learn this subject in person. They also made some comparisons between these classes and the classes in English centers and YouTube videos. They claimed that with that amount of tuition fee, they could find an English center to learn directly with the teacher who would fix their errors and take care of them directly (M1). In addition, according to M2, there are many free videos guiding how to pronounce by native speakers on YouTube.

Evaluating the overall experience in learning pronunciation in MS Teams classes, a part of the participants claimed that they were willing to keep this learning mode because under the setting of the pandemic, learning pronunciation in MS Teams classes is the best choice (F1); or just because they were eager to learn no matter what difficulties they faced (F2). On the other hand, the other three students seemed to be unhappy with this format of learning pronunciation. According to F3 and M1, they felt shy and awkward when appearing before the camera or practicing alone. Additionally, M2 already took advantage of the class recordings and videos on YouTube, so he ignored the class.

5. Conclusion

This study built on previous research by examining students' perceptions of learning English pronunciation in MS. Teams classes. The disadvantages, such as technological obstacles and noisy living environments, were listed and discussed. In conclusion, the majority of survey

participants agreed that listening to class recordings was a benefit of learning English pronunciation in MS. Teams lessons. But there were still drawbacks brought on by the Internet, limited resources, and background noise.

This study has some constraints due to the small sample size, not yet highly representative, and limited to the foreign language department of Van Hien University. Therefore, it still needs to conduct more studies with a larger sample size by surveying the foreign language departments of universities about learning English skills via online classes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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