FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

DISNEY MOVIE DUBBING AS A PRONUNCIATION INTERVENTION FOR VIETNAMESE NON-MAJORED EFL UNDERGRADUATES

NGUYEN QUANG NGOAN* - NGUYEN HO MINH PHUC**

ABSTRACT: This article presents the research findings of the impacts of Disney movie dubbing (DMD) on EFL undergraduates' pronunciation and their perceptions towards the activity. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 98 non-English students at Nha Trang University, Vietnam. Collectively, the experimental group (EG) (n = 49) practised DMD for a twelve-week period while the control group (CG) (n = 49) received traditional pronunciation instruction. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that the EG witnessed significant improvement ($p < .001$, $r = 865$) while the CG did not. Moreover, the EG students held positive perceptions across all the measured areas. Suprasegmental features such as intonation, rhythm, and connected speech were found to be the facets that possessed greatest growth. The study suggests that DMD is a useful approach for teaching pronunciation in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, particularly within higher educational context.

KEY WORDS: Disney movie dubbing; EFL pronunciation; suprasegmental features; task-based language teaching; quasi experimental.

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1. Introduction

Pronunciation is widely believed as one of the most the most neglected areas of English language teaching. Kelly (1969) once called it the 'Cinderella' of language teaching, for it has received far less attention comparing to grammar, vocabulary, or reading. In Vietnam, this problem is particularly serious due to the fact that Vietnamese and English have very different sound systems, and that Vietnamese learners frequently have difficulty with consonant clusters, word stress, and rhythm of English speech (Nguyen & Newton, 2020). In fact, English textbooks used in Vietnamese schools provide minimum space for pronunciation to practise, and many teachers may have possibly not been trained in how to teach it effectively. In the corollary, numerous students still have trouble making themselves understood in English, even after a long period of study.

In recent years, movie dubbing has appeared to be a promising method for pronunciation instruction. In dubbing activities, learners watch movie clips, listen to the characters' speech, and then record their own voices over the original dialogue. This gives them a chance to practise pronunciation in a meaningful and enjoyable context (Chiu, 2012; Oanh, 2021). Henceforth, Disney animated movies are especially pertinent for this purpose because of its affluence in intonation, rhythm, and most importantly, it is globally recognised for its popularity. Nonetheless, there remained a scarcity of studies concerning whether dubbing works for non-English majored students at university levels.

From that rationale, this study was carried out to fill the gap, aiming to answer two research questions: (1) What are the impacts of DMD on EFL students' pronunciation? and (2) What are EFL students' perceptions of DMD towards their pronunciation learning?

2. Literature review

Pronunciation includes two core aspects: segmental features (individual consonants and vowels)

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and suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech). According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), teaching pronunciation should cover both aspects, with a noteworthy attention to suprasegmental patterns because they play a momentous role in shaping how natural and understandable a speaker sounds. Derwing and Munro (2015) add that pronunciation improvement requires focused practice, good speech models as well as regular feedback. In Vietnam, in contrast, pronunciation teaching encounters myriads of challenges such as large class sizes, time allocation, and curricula concentration which are inherently focused on grammar and reading. Moreover, teachers often lack training in approaches to teach suprasegmental features, namely stress and intonation (Nguyen & Newton, 2020).

With the respect of Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) claim that people learn best when three basic needs are fulfilled: autonomy (feeling in control), competence (feeling able to improve), and relatedness (feeling connected to each other). In fact, pronunciation learning is a domain where these needs are especially relevant. Speaking aloud exposes learners to judgement, and when pronunciation activities feel forced, there will be an increase in anxiety and lack of willingness to engage. Conversely, activities that offer meaningful choices, show learners visible evidence of their own improvement, and create a low-pressure atmosphere which, in turn, can transform pronunciation practice from stress obligation into a motivating experience.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) which places meaningful, authentic task at the centre of instruction rather than isolated grammar exercises (Ellis et al., 2020). Willis (1996) proposes a widely used three-stage model: a pre-task stage where the teacher introduces the topic and sets goals, a task cycle where learners carry out the activity, and a language focus stage where they reflect on particular features of the language they used. Notably, movie dubbing can certainly map onto this structure. In the pre-task, the teacher introduces the suggested series of clips and highlights target pronunciation features. During the task cycle, students watch, analyse tones, imitate, and record. In the language focus stage, they compare their recordings against the original and make justifiable adjustments.

There is a small but growing body of research supports the use of dubbing for pronunciation. Chiu (2012) found that EFL learners who participated in film dubbing projects made clear gains in pronunciation accuracy, comparing to those who did not. In a same vein, Oanh (2021) conducted a movie dubbing study at a Vietnamese university with English-majored students, and it emphasized that those students outperformed those who made free-choice videos in pronunciation accuracy, stress recognition, and connected speech. Additionally, Wei et al. (2022) reported online dubbing improved Chinese university students' pronunciation clarity while also building their confidence and learning autonomy. These studies are considered as the underpinnings, leading to the significance of this study. Notwithstanding, there are a paucity on research on non-English majored Vietnamese learners, particularly within higher educational level. That is also considered as a gap, delineating the present inquiry from Oanh (2021) whose research was exclusively centred on English-majored students, and one that this study aims to address.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and participants

The study adopted a mix-method quasi-experimental design. The quantitative components established whether DMD produced measurable considerable gains, while the qualitative sections delve into exploring how students experienced and perceived the activity. Conducted at Nha Trang University, 98 non-English majored undergraduates from the General English B1.2 Course (2 classes, 49 participants/ each class) were selected for the research: EG (n = 49) and CG (n = 49). In detail, the sample was balanced by gender (50% male; 50% female), with most of the students classified at B1 level (77.6%). Importantly, 85,7% of participants had never experienced any dubbing activity before, making the sample source diverse and nuanced.

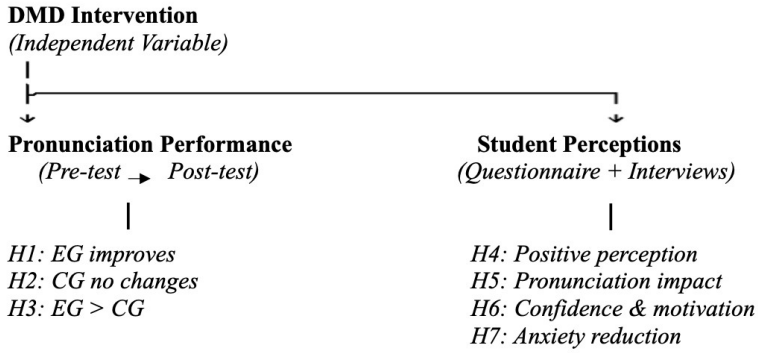


Figure 1. *Research hypotheses*

3.2. Procedures

The EG received a 12-week DMD intervention following Willis's (1996) Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduced the suggested Disney scenes and pointed out the key pronunciation features such as stress patterns, intonation contours, and connected speech processes. During the task cycle, EG (n = 49) students watched the clip that they selected multiple times, practised mimicking the characters' speech, and recorded their dubbed versions using digital recording tools proposed by the teacher. In the language focus stage, they listened to their own recordings, compared them with the Disney original model, and made corrections. Disney scenes are valid once fulfil the requirements: clear speech models, emotional richness, and wealth in prosodic features. At the same time, the CG (n = 49) followed traditional pronunciation instruction throughout the period which consisted of textbook-based drills and listen-and-repeat exercises. Given this process, both research groups took part in a post-test after the intervention to accentuate applicable improvement. Finally, the EG was given a post-phase questionnaire (n =49) and interviews (n = 5) with purpose of exploring their perceptions and attitudes towards the DMD duration.

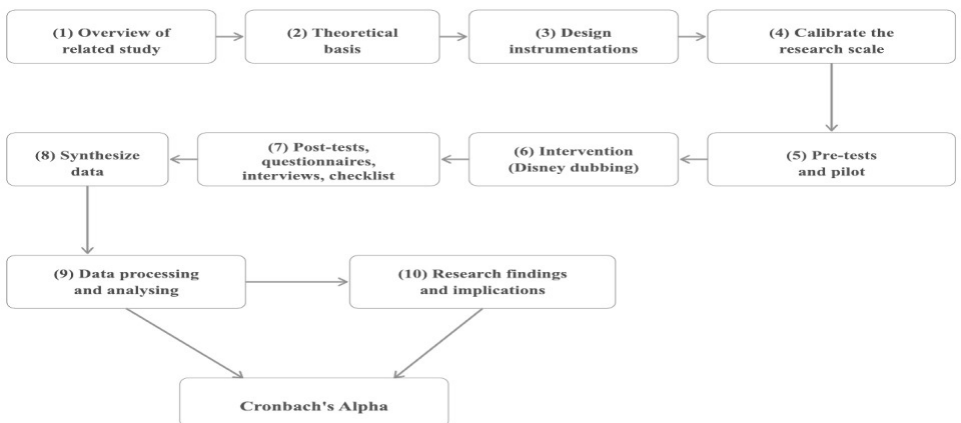


Figure 2. *Research procedures*

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Impacts of DMD on pronunciation performance

Table 1. *Pre-test performance level distribution by group (25 mark maximum in pre-and post-test)*

Performance Level	***EG (n)***	**EG (%)**	***CG (n)***	**CG (%)**	**Total (%)**
Poor	2	4.1	4	8.2	6.1
Below Average	25	51.0	34	69.4	60.2
Average	19	38.8	10	20.4	29.6
Good	3	6.1	1	2.0	4.1
Excellent	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0

Table 1 presents the pre-test performance distribution both research groups. In particular, both groups were mainly in the lower performance tiers, with the bulk of students in Below Average (EG: 51%; CG: 69.4%), and no students reached Excellent in either group. In fact, the EG showed a slightly more balanced distribution, with 38.8% at Average compared to the CG's 20.4% though this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .107$). Moreover, the combined data reveal that most of the participants joined the study with below average proficiency; this confirms that both commenced from a comparable and equal in pronunciation benchmark performance.

Table 2. *Descriptives statistics of pre-test and post-test score for both groups*

Group	**Min**	**Max**	**M**	**SD (pre)**	**Min**	**Max**	**M**	**SD (post)**
EG	6.00	21.00	13.10	2.869	8.00	23.00	17.43	3.069
CG	8.00	20.00	12.27	2.129	8.00	20.00	12.49	2.042

As can be seen from Table 2, the two groups demonstrated comparable pronunciation proficiency prior to the intervention, with the EG obtaining a mean score of 13.10 (SD = 2.869) and the CG achieving 12.27 (SD = 2.129). In fact, the Independent-Sample T-test confirmed no statistical significance between the two groups at the pre-test ($t = 1.63$; $p = .017$), thereby creating an equivalence baseline for comparison. It is also noteworthy that the pre-test SDs indicates a moderate degree within internal heterogeneity in both research groups, implying that learners in the EG centred the study with a somewhat wider range of pre-existing pronunciation competency. Following the 12-week intervention, the EG showed a substantial increment to 17.43 (SD = 3.069), representing a gain of 4.33 points (33.1%). Meanwhile, the CG recorded a negligible change of 0.22 points. Notably, the EG's score range shifted upward from 6.00 to 21.00 in the pre-test and from 8.00 to 23.00, indicating improvement across all performance levels; in contrast, the CG's range remained unchanged at 8.00 – 20.00. These findings suggest that DMD produced a broad and meaningful impacts on the EG's pronunciation performance, while traditional methods may prove no observable change. With the respect to the standard deviations, there was a nuanced pattern that requires closer examination. The EGs' SD increased slightly from 2.896 to 3.069 as the intervention occurred; this can be interpreted that while overall performance enhanced chiefly, there still remained individual variability that had modest improvement.

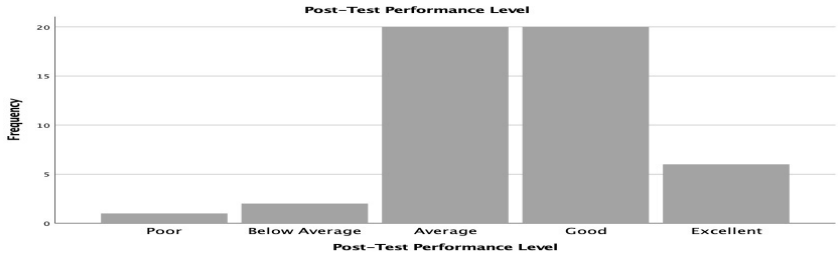
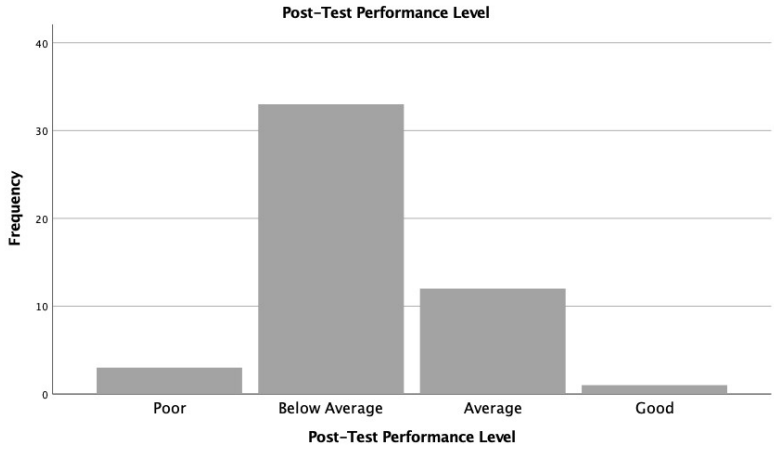


Figure 3. *Post-test performance of the experimental group*

Figure 3 shows the post-test performance distribution of the EG, with most students achieve the Average tier (n ≈ 20) and Good tier (n ≈ 20). Remarkably, the lower levels have nearly vanished, merely 1 student remained in Poor and 2 in Below Average tier while 6 students reached Excellent, a level that was initially empty before the intervention. This shift showcases that DMD not only helped a few strong-performed students get higher but also lifted the entire group, moving most students from below-average proficiency up to good performance with a duration of 12 weeks. Noticeably, there was no student in the CG attained the Excellent, and the Poor category still remained 3 students. Henceforth, this static distribution, nearly unchanged from pre-test, and it reveals that traditional pronunciation teaching method, in this case, failed to produce the upward mobility that could be observed in the EG, leaving the majority of students trapped in below-average performance within 12 weeks of intervention exposure.

Figure 4. *Post-test performance of the control group*



On the other hand, as shown in Figure 4, the post-test performance distribution of the CG remained stable throughout 12 weeks of traditional pronunciation instruction. The Below Average tier alone contained in the vicinity of 33 students (67.3%), while only 12 students reached Average and just 1 reached Good tier. In addition, it was reported that no student in the CG attained the Excellent tier, and the Poor still remained 3 students. From these findings, it can be interpreted that traditional pronunciation instruction may not solely be less effective than DMD but functionally inert, and it also failed to generate upward pressure that moves learners across performance thresholds. Indeed, the fact that 12 weeks of DMD exposure left two-thirds of the group below average raises a deeper inquiry whether conventional methods cannot change the plurality of learner population even one performance tier upward in an entire semester, what justification remains for maintaining them as the default approach?

In terms of DMD learning, Figure 3 shows the radar chart from classroom observation data across five dimensions of the DMD intervention. Each letter stands for one category on a 5-point scale.

Specifically, Task-based learning (B) and Pronunciation development (C) received the highest scores reported. Both sections reached the outer chart edges, meaning that DMD truly engaged students in structured language tasks as well as improved pronunciation performance. Moreover, these findings align with the quantitative results which witnessed the strong improvement from the EG (r = .856). The questionnaire data also support this result, for pronunciation items additionally received the highest agreement scores (d = 1.34). Audio-visual input engagement (A) was also highly scored, albeit the remained scores from below the maximum level. This can be interpreted that while most students were actively watching, rewatching, and using visual cues, a small minority may have engaged more passively and inconsistently. Motivation and affect (D) showed strong and positive results since students viewed the activity as enjoyable, motivating, and supportive. These findings support the SDT theory framework because autonomy supportive task certainly increased students' engagement. Challenges (E) recorded the lowest observation throughout the intervention. In this section, a lower score represents a constructive outcome, for it indicated fewer technical difficulties from learners. The results imply that students could manage and overcome many early problems themselves within the 12-week duration. However, these problems came from other factors including pacing issues, lip sync timing and L1 transfer. The findings also suggest that DMD support learning effectively.

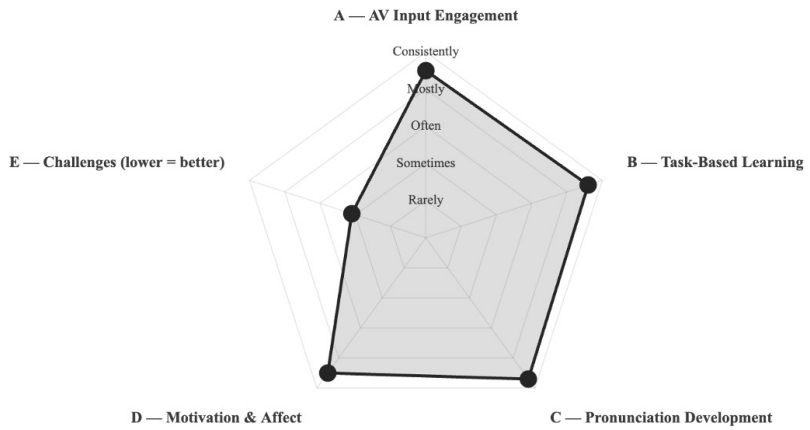


Figure 5. *Mean observation ratings per sections (Scale 1 to 5)*

4.2. Perceptions towards DMD

Table 3. *One-Sample T-Test Results for Cluster Means Against Neutral Midpoint 3.0*

Cluster	N	M	SD	t	p	d
1 - Perceptions toward DMD	49	3.96	0.84	8.006	< .001	1.144
2 - Impacts on Pronunciation	49	3.99	0.74	9.355	< .001	1.336
3 - Confidence and Motivation	49	3.87	0.75	8.166	< .001	1.167
4 - Pronunciation Anxiety	49	3.54	0.73	5.116	< .001	0.731

The T-test results in Table 3 provides compelling evidence that students from the EG held significantly positive perceptions of the DMD intervention across all four measured dimensions (all p < .001 = highly significant). Such findings stand out as particularly noteworthy for this study. Firstly, Cluster 2 (Impacts on pronunciation) produced the highest mean (M = 3.99, SD = 0.74) and also the strongest t-value in the entire analysis (= 9.355), alongside with the largest effect size (d = 1.336). This finding indicated that students truly perceived the DMD activity as having the most influential

and consistent positive impacts on their pronunciation learning, especially in the domain of pronunciation development.

Table 4. *Themes Identified from Semi-Structured Interview Data (N = 5)*

Theme	Description	N	Representative excerpt
Theme 1	DMD as engaging and meaningful pronunciation practice	5	*"It does not feel like studying in a boring way." (DUB-01)*
Theme 2	Improvement in suprasegmental features through character imitation	5	*"The dubbing helped me speak more naturally - like a native speaker, not just reading words one by one." (DUB-04)*
Theme 3	Increased segmental awareness through close and repeated listening	5	*"I had to pronounce each word clearly. This helped me pay more attention to final sounds like /t/, /d/, and /s/." (DUB-05)*
Theme 4	Confidence building and reduction in pronunciation anxiety	5	*"My anxiety decreased because the activity was fun and not too focused on making mistakes." (DUB-05)*
Theme 5	Increased autonomy and out-of-class pronunciation practice	5	*"The activity turned pronunciation practice into something fun and meaningful rather than a repetitive task." (DUB-03)*

Table 4 demonstrates five major themes identified from the semi-structured interview data. In general, all the participants reported that DMD created an engaging and meaningful learning experience, which increase their interest in pronunciation practice, hence learning autonomy. Moreover, the students also perceived noticeable improvement in suprasegmental features such as rhythm, stress, and natural speech through character imitation. In addition, repeated listening activities helped them pay closer attention to segmental features, especially in final consonant sounds. The data further showcased that DMD eased down pronunciation anxiety level, increased speaking confidence, and more importantly, encouraged them to practise independently outside the classroom.

Theme 1. DMD as engaging and meaningful pronunciation practice

All the five participants described DMD as more engaging than traditional pronunciation exercises, consistently contrasting it with textbook drills and isolated sound repetition. In detail, DUB-01 stated: "*Compared to traditional pronunciation exercises, dubbing Disney movie feels more engaging because I am learning through real contexts and emotions. It does not feel like studying in a boring way" (DUB-01 as translated from Vietnamese).* In the same vein, DUB-02 described a similar turn in the nature of the task itself when he explained, *"It felt less like studying and more like an enjoyable activity, which encouraged me to take initiative in improving my pronunciation" (DUB-02 as translated from Vietnamese).*

Theme 2: Improvement in suprasegmental features through character imitation

In general, all the five interviewees reported steadily to perceive gains in suprasegmental features, particularly in intonation, stress, and natural speech rhythm. Indeed, this was the most elaborated theme across all the interview patterns. DUB-04 described the mechanism most clearly:

Disney movies express many different emotions, so when you imitate the characters' intonations, it helps you learn to go up and down with your voice naturally. The dubbing helped me speak more naturally. Just like a native speaker way, not just reading words one by one.

(DUB-04 as translated from Vietnamese)

Meanwhile. DUB-01 identified emotionally expressive scenes as the most productive contexts for intonation development, claiming that "*By coping the characters, I learned how to stress words correctly and use natural intonation patterns, especially in emotional scenes. It helped my speech sound less flat and more like a real conversation" (DUB-01 as translated from Vietnamese).*

Theme 3: Increased segmental awareness through close and repeated listening

The participants reported that the need to closely synchronise with the Disney character sharpened their attention to individual sounds which was an outcome they did not associate with traditional listening tasks. DUB-05 provided the most specific account:

When I dubbed, I had to pronounce each word clearly to match the characters' dialogue. This helped me pay more attention to final sounds like /t/, /d/, and /s/. When dubbing slow, emotionally rich scenes. I could also distinguish between similar vowels sounds like /i/ and /i:/ more easily.

(DUB-05 as translated from Vietnamese)

DUB-03 and DUB-04 described similar experiences, while DUB-02 summarised the process concisely as *"I became more aware of consonant and vowel sounds by closely imitating native speakers" (DUB-02 as translated from Vietnamese).*

Theme 4: Confidence building and reduction of pronunciation anxiety

From the semi-structured interviews, there recorded a clear shift from anxiety in the first place to confidence increase as DUB-05 reported:

At first, I felt a bit nervous because I was not used to recording my voice but after a few sessions of dubbing. I became more comfortable and confident. My anxiety decreased because the activity was fun and not too focused on making mistakes.

(DUB-05 as translated from Vietnamese)

DUB-01 noted that the activity felt like a game rather than a test, whereas DUB-02 described a more substantive shift: "*After the dubbing activity, I no longer hesitate when pronouncing English in conversation. I became more confident in speaking and more willing to use English to communicate." (DUB-02 as translated from Vietnamese).*

Theme 5: Increase autonomy and out-of-class pronunciation practice

All of the five participants reported practising pronunciation independently outside of class as a direct result of their engagement with DMD. DUB-03 described the nature of this shift: *"I even practised outside of class because I want to perform better. The activity turned pronunciation practice into something fun and meaningful rather than a repetitive task" (DUB-03 as translated from Vietnamese).* Meanwhile, DUB-01 admitted that her voluntary practice is appeal of the content itself. DUB-02 also identified the multimodal combination of visuals, storytelling, and voice dubbing as the specific feature that sustained motivation, while DUB-04 provided the clearest evidence of real-world transfer:

The dubbing activity made me more willing to speak English with friends or with foreign tourists in Nha Trang city. Having confidence in pronunciation and knowing how to use intonation correctly makes me feel more excited about speaking English.

(DUB-04 as translated from Vietnamese).

5. Conclusion

The study shows that DMD positively influenced EFL students' pronunciation performance and learning perception. The students in the EG achieved significant pronunciation improvement, especially in suprasegmental features such as intonation, rhythm, and connected speech. The intervention also increases motivation, confidence, classroom engagement, and autonomous pronunciation practice while reducing anxiety level during speaking activities. Although several limitations existed, the overall results support DMD as an effective and practical instructional activity for pronunciation learning in EFL contexts. Notably, future studies could continue exploring the

application of DMD across different learner groups, proficiency levels, and technological settings to strengthen and extend the current findings.

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Ứng dụng lồng tiếng phim hoạt hình Disney trong việc nâng cao phát âm cho sinh viên không chuyên ngữ

Tóm tắt: Bài báo này trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu về tác động của hoạt động lồng tiếng phim hoạt hình Disney đến kỹ năng phát âm tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên ngữ và nhận thức của sinh viên đối với hoạt động này. Nghiên cứu sử dụng mô hình thiết kế bán thực nghiệm với 98 sinh viên tại Trường Đại học Nha Trang. Nhóm thực nghiệm (n = 49) tham gia lồng tiếng trong 12 tuần và nhóm đối chứng (n = 49) được học phát âm theo phương pháp truyền thống. Dữ liệu được thu thập qua bài kiểm tra tiền kiểm và hậu kiểm, bảng khảo sát và phỏng vấn. Kết quả cho thấy nhóm thực nghiệm có sự tiến bộ rõ rệt ($p < .001$; $r = .865$), trong khi nhóm đối chứng không ghi nhận thay đổi đáng kể. Nhóm sinh viên tham gia thực nghiệm thể hiện thái độ tích cực ở mọi khía cạnh khảo sát hậu can thiệp trong đó chỉ ra rằng ngữ điệu, nhịp điệu và nối âm là những mặt được cải thiện nhiều nhất. Nghiên cứu cũng khẳng định lồng tiếng Disney là hướng đi hữu ích trong giảng dạy ngữ âm, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh đại học tại Việt Nam.

Từ khoá*:* Lồng tiếng phim Disney; phát âm tiếng Anh; yếu tố siêu đoạn tính; dạy học theo nhiệm vụ; bán thực nghiệm.