

**CONSONANTS: A QUICK WAY TO IMPROVE /B/ AND /V/; /D/ AND /L/  
PRONUNCIATION FOR THAI STUDENTS**

**Tran Thi Loan**

*Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy*

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this study is to improve pronunciation of two pairs of English consonants for Thai students at Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy by using various language games and exercises. The researcher randomly selected 14 students in 10 at Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy, then divided them into two equal different groups called the experimental group and the control group. Those respondents took part in pre-test and post-test by reading a passage aloud and listening to a short text to assess their pronunciation focusing on two pairs of consonants /b/ and /v/; /d/ and /l/. While pronunciation games and exercises were practiced with the experimental group, the control group were corrected with imitating and dictation and whenever they produce those sounds wrongly. This study lasted an hour to each group inside the classroom. The finding implies that both of these groups succeed in enhancing the pronunciation of some confusing consonants, but the experimental group is likely to be better at pronouncing compared to the control group.*

**KEYWORDS:** confusing consonants, Thai students, games and exercises, pronunciation improvement, teaching English.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It is argued that there are two schools of thought in the field of spoken English for nonnative speakers. Some people believe that grammar and vocabulary in English are much more important than pronunciation. However, many others indicate that without correct pronunciation, whatever people say will be difficult to understand or misunderstand even their grammar and vocabulary are perfect.

It is a fact that the language varies from one country to another. For example, English is multisyllabic, while Thai is monosyllabic language. It raises a question how this influence speakers of Thai language background in the North of Vietnam on studying English pronunciation.

Among 54 races living in Vietnam, Thai people, ethnic minority, are in the third largest of Vietnamese population. Their language background is a bit similar to Thai (Thailand) and Laotian in terms of sound and spelling. There is no doubt that Thai students at Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy are very fond of learning English since it is useful

for them not to enrich their culture and widen their language knowledge, but also study computer subject. Furthermore, English is regarded as an essential and compulsory subject in their school.

There are a number of problems causing difficulties for Thai students to learn English:

Firstly, before studying English, Thai students have to learn Kinh (national language) first, and then they study English. So English is their third language.

Secondly, unlike English, each Thai word has only one syllable, with one letter or a combination of letters per sound. In addition to this, it is often said the same way it is spelled whilst English pronunciation is not related to the spelling of words.

Thirdly, when it comes to segmental, most of all Thai students make mistakes when pronouncing some phonemes, that is, the substitution of /b/ for /v/ or /l/ for /d/ and vice versa as in *book* -> /vʊk/, *vacation* -> /bə'keɪʃən/ or *look* -> /dʊk/, *door* -> /lɔː/. These sounds are not pronounced when they occur as final consonant, especially.

In addition, the school has nothing but textbooks. It lacks teaching aids both for teaching and learning such as videos, radios, reference books, materials, overhead projectors, internet, etc. This results in the difficulty for students to learn and improve their English in general and English pronunciation in particular.

Finally, the number of students in a class is too large, at least 50. Apparently, some teachers of English lack experience in teaching pronunciation, they may even have poor pronunciation. One more thing is that the students are too shy to spell English as it seems funny.

To one's knowledge, if you want to speak English well, you must work on your pronunciation. Thus, pronunciation is extremely important as it not only makes your first impression but also nobody could understand what you mean because you had bad pronunciation. In addition, the speaker is impossible communicate perfectly in English when s/he is abroad.

When it comes to the important of pronunciation of consonants, some people propose that it is much less important than others like stress, syllable, liaison, rhythm, explosion or intonation. So a recent trend in pronunciation teaching shows that we should concentrate on teaching suprasegmental rather than worrying about the pronunciation of segmental. Nevertheless, many people reckon that consonants play a vital role in English pronunciation since they have strong relation to letters in writing and are easiest to concern and work on. Moreover, Jenkins (2002) notes that, "All the consonants are important except for *th* as in *thin* and *this*".

The replacement of /l/ for /d/ or /b/ for /v/ and vice versa makes a world of difference to the meaning. For instance, "*I drink a lot of milk*" versus "*I drink a dot of milk*" (The former may mean the speaker drinks much milk while the later may illustrate s/she drinks not

much milk, but just only a little milk). Another example, “*a mother’s dove for her daughter*” versus “*a mother’s love for her daughter*”, the meaning is quite different again. In above cases, if we take the context away, we will be left with ambiguity.

In this paper, the researcher dealt with the difficulty that happens with Thai students in English pronunciation. In particular, she focused her attention on how to help Thai students avoid pronouncing *b* instead of *v* and *l* instead of *d*.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In terms of pronunciation teaching Derwing and Munro (2005) denote that it is significant to make students aware of phonological features and patterns underlying the second language. Yule et al. (1987) evoke that to be able to self-monitor is highly appreciated to overcome pronunciation problem. One should record the conversation that he/she produced then find the mistakes himself/herself or find someone who is willing to point out.

Many people believe that learning rules of how to speak consonants correctly is the best way. Nonetheless, ESL (English as a second language) professor find that good pronunciation is learning from life. For instance, Tuan shares his experience that he always makes mistake when pronouncing *l* and *d*. Luckily, his two close friends are Linh and Duong, so when he calls them each time, he can practice these sounds.

Derwing and Munro (2005) seem to disapprove some techniques given by some ESL instructors. To be specific, asking students to hold a pencil between nose and upper lip have little or no value to improve pronunciation. Derwing and Munro (2005) also point out that, it is “perceptual training” not “production training” that will lead to automatic improvement. This empirical research is considered as an effective approach to the discrimination.

It can be argued that it is practice that improves the pronunciation: “I go to a coffee meeting every week where I can talk with some native speakers” (a French student shared in Vitanova and Miller, 2002). Additionally, according to Acton (1997) it is advisable for you to practice as much as possible: “practice, practice, practice, and then practice some more”. Moreover, as some researchers’ experiences “say it after me” or in other words “repeat after me” (as cited in Lauril, 2013 and Morales, 2013). This technique suggests that students should observe the mouth movements of the instructors, after that they imitate them.

Also in Acton’s (1997) research, pronunciation needs both concentration and freedom. It is likely that we, the teachers of English, should take into consideration English speaking environment. The teacher should create more opportunities for students to speak English together in the class and outside the class.

Many researchers are concerned with motivation as a need to help students to learn pronunciation (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; and Temario, 2006: 195). Ara (2009) indicates that using songs, rhymes and games as effective ways to create interests and motivate the

young to learn pronunciation and thanks to these techniques students study without consciousness of learning a language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study aimed to design the activities to correct some English pronunciation errors of consonants /l/, /d/, /b/ and /v/. To investigate the significant ways to improve two pairs of confused consonant pronunciation, on the one hand, the researcher taught the control group using common teaching method: listening and imitating, visual aids, dictation, minimal pair distinction etc. On the other hand, she used teaching techniques songs, games, and exercises to teach the experimental group.

In terms of design correction activities, the researcher paid much attention to aspects that may influence on pronunciation such as perception, voice, age, energy, gender, race, attitude and ability from that the way how and what to teach students were built. The hypothesis was that experiment groups would produce two pairs of sound better than the control group after using teaching strategies mentioned above.

### **Participants**

Fourteen subjects are Thai students in classes Y1A-K47, Y1B-K47, Y1C-K47, Y1D-K47, Y1E-K47, Y1F-K47, Y1G-K47, Y1H-K47, Y1I- K47, Y1K- K47 at Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy. There were eight female students and six male students at the age of 17 and divided equally in two groups. All of them started learning English from grade 10 with bilingual instruction (Vietnamese and English) and received an hour and a half per week (class time only).

### **Instruments**

With the aim of analyzing and correcting the pronunciation of the wrong consonants for the Thai students, the researcher needed to test both correspondents' voices and their ability to recognize the right consonants. Therefore, she used apps Brand New Sealed Olympus NN-541PC to record students' reading of a short story "A Wise Old Owl" (Appendix A) which consists of two pairs of consonants mentioned above in different positions. In addition, the recording of a short talk "Loving or Being Loved" (Appendix B) was also used as the data and edited into a gap filling listening exercise including error consonants in order to test the improvement of pronunciation before and after using songs, exercises and games.

### **Procedures**

Basing on the results of pre-test speaking and listening, the researcher planned the process of correcting pronunciation process and then share and get suggestions and advice from her colleagues. After getting permission from the Department of Education and Training, the researcher carried out applying both theoretical (how to produces the confused sounds) and practical (through songs, exercises and games) ways with the aim at improving

pronunciation of two pair consonants. The data collected were analyzed by using a paired sample t-test.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

**Table 1. Information on pre-test and post-test listening and speaking scores**

Test	Timing	Average Points	Participants	Standard deviation	Standard errors
Listening	After experiment	4.250	14	1.2519	.3346
	Before experiment	1.500	14	.7596	.2030
Speaking	After experiment	5.179	14	1.3813	.3692
	Before experiment	2.357	14	.7949	.2124

Table 1 indicates that there are totally 14 subjects attending listening and speaking tests before and after the experiments. While the listening scores before and after the tests are 1.50 and 4.25 respectively, the points of speaking before and after the experiment are 2.36 and 5.18 respectively.

**Table 2. Points of listening and speaking exercises before and after experiments in the experimental group**

##### Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Listening point_After experiment	5.286	7	.3934	.1487	0.000
	Listening point_Before experiment	1.429	7	.9322	.3523	
Pair 2	Speaking point_After experiment	6.143	7	.6268	.2369	0.000
	Speaking point_Before experiment	2.071	7	.3450	.1304	

Table 2 shows that the pronunciation practice through songs and games help enhance listening and speaking points. In particular, listening point increases by 3.857 and speaking point goes up 4.072. This change is statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3. Points of listening and speaking tests before and after experiments in the control group**

##### Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Listening point_After experiment	3.214	7	.8591	.3247	0.000
	Listening point_Before experiment	1.571	7	.6075	.2296	
Pair 2	Speaking point_After experiment	4.214	7	1.2536	.4738	0.000
	Speaking point_Before experiment	2.643	7	1.0293	.3891	

After applying the traditional teaching method, the points of listening and speaking skills increase (1.6429 and 1.5714, respectively). This increase is statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 4: Points of listening and speaking tests between the two survey groups**

Group Statistics							
	Experimental group Control group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Sig (2-tailed)
Listening point_Before	Experimental group	7	1.429	.9322	.3523	-.340	.740
	Control group	7	1.571	.6075	.2296		
Speaking point_Before	Experimental group	7	2.071	.3450	.1304	-1.393	.205
	Control group	7	2.643	1.0293	.3891		
Listening point_After	Experimental group	7	5.286	.3934	.1487	5.800	.000
	Control group	7	3.214	.8591	.3247		
Speaking point_After	Experimental group	7	6.143	.6268	.2369	3.641	.003
	Control group	7	4.214	1.2536	.4738		

Before the experiment, the listening score of the experimental group was lower than that of the control group, in particular the experimental group is 1.429 and the control group is 1.571. This difference, however, is not statistically significant with  $p = 0.740$ . Similarly, speaking score before the experiment, in the experimental group is 2.071, and the control group is 2.643, the difference is not statistically significant because of  $p = 0.205$ .

After the experiment, the listening score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group of 2.072 points, this difference is statistically significant with  $p = 0.0001$ . Similar to speaking skill, score in the experimental group is higher than that of the control group of 1.929 points. This difference is statistically significant.

Therefore, the results imply that there is an improvement of pronunciation of using minimal pairs, repetition, and dictation for those who confused these pairs of consonants, but it is likely that songs and games can help them to progress their pronunciation better.

## CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the study that there is a statistically significant difference between the control group and the experimental group based on the post test results. After carrying out the experiment for both skills, listening results increase significantly with 2.072 points while speaking points reach 1.929 points (even speaking is lower than listening but still much higher compared with that of the control group). Thus, according to the findings given it can be deduced the following conclusion.

Firstly, the experimental group corrected problematic consonants better than the control group, which indicates that applying songs, games, and exercises in teaching language in general and improving confused consonants in particular is a significant method. To some extent, however, the traditional teaching methods such as repetition or minimal pairs are still useful for enhancing pronunciation providing that the instructors use them suitably.

Secondly, through interview and observation of both groups, the experimental group was more self-confident when taking the post-test listening and speaking than the control group. When speaking the students in the experimental group seemed to be less shy and spoke more aloud, clearly and fluently instead of swallowing the confused sounds as before.

Finally, students in the experimental groups had positive attitude towards correcting error sounds and were highly motivated owing to the fun from interesting songs and games which makes them eager to learn and are not afraid of making mistakes when learning English language.

## **FUTURE STUDIES**

In this study the researcher tries to simplify the activities so that students can easily follow and are willing to learn because they are the ethnic minority students. In addition to this, time in class is limited, so to help students for long term improvement, the teacher should provide students some more assignments and useful websites so that they can self-study. Relying on this study, the researcher can design other activities to improve students' some pairs of confused sounds of their mother tongue combining both traditional and modern methods such as minimal pairs, crosswords, pictures and realia, stories and projects.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Speaking: A Wise Old Owl**

There was an old owl that lived in an oak. Everyday he saw incidents happening around him. Yesterday he saw a boy helping an old man to carry a heavy basket. Today he saw a girl shouting at her mother. The more he saw the less he spoke.

As he spoke less, he heard more. He heard people talking and telling stories. He heard a woman saying that an elephant jumped over a fence. He also heard a man saying that he had never made a mistake.

The old owl had seen and heard about what happened to people. Some became better and some became worse. But the old owl had become wiser each and every day.

Adopted from <http://www.english-for-students.com/a-wise-old-owl.html>

### **Appendix B**

#### **Listening: Loving and being loved**

Confusingly, we speak of love as one thing rather than discerning the two very different \_\_\_\_\_ (1) that line beneath the single word

Being love, and \_\_\_\_\_(2)

We can only make relationship work when we're ready to do latter and we aware of our unnatural, immature fixation on the former. We start knowing only \_\_\_\_\_(3) being love. It comes to seem, \_\_\_\_\_ (4) wrongly, like the norm. To the child it feels as if the parent is simply spontaneously on hand: to comfort, guide, tame, feed, clear up and will remain almost always warm and cheerful. Parents don't \_\_\_\_\_ (5) how often they've \_\_\_\_\_ (6) their tongue, fought \_\_\_\_\_(7) the tears, and \_\_\_\_\_ (8) too tired to take off their clothes after a day of child care. The relationship is almost always entirely non-reciprocal, the parents \_\_\_\_\_ (9), but they don't expect the favour to be returned in any significant way: the parent doesn't get upset when the child doesn't notice the new haircut, asks carefully calibrated questions about how the meeting at work went, or suggests that go upstairs and take a nap. Parents and child may both love, \_\_\_\_\_(10) each party is on a very different end of the axis, \_\_\_\_\_ unbeknownst \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ child.

Adopted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhyfBi-Ad4c>



## Appendix C

### Suggested Activities to Improve Pronunciation of Confused /b/ and /v/ Sounds.

#### I. In the classroom

##### 1. Teaching voiced /b/ and /v/ sounds

Play the video of this pair of sounds. Ask students to say how to make the sounds to elicit the different pronunciation. Then repeat how to pronounce them.

Teacher: How to make /b/sound?

Students: - Close your lips tight.  
- Push air forward in your mouth.  
- Open your lips and release the air quickly, while using your voice



T: How to produce/v/ sound?





S: -Touch your top teeth with your bottom lip  
-Blow out air between your teeth and your lip  
-Use your voice while releasing the air

##### 2. Practice the sounds

###### a. Worksheets

Match the words to the pictures then speak them aloud.

boat	
veil	

berry	
vat	
beer	
van	

**b. Games**

***b1. Stand up, sit down***

Teacher puts the table with your minimal pairs on the board. Assign each sound an action: the sound /b/ could be "stand up", and the sound /v/ could be "sit down". Then teacher speaks out the word, and the students should perform the action. The last student who does the correct action becomes 'caller' and calls out the next word.

***b2. Odd one out***

Students could work in pairs or small groups with one person pronouncing the words and the others indicating which is odd.

climb   lamb   rob  
berry   very   vary  
beer   bier   veer

***b3. Wearing Crowns***

Teacher says words while students find and wear crowns with the words which /b/ and /v/ sounds are in different positions as in:

*Bowl-vole*

*Gibbon-given*

*Serb-serve*

***b4. Using realia.***

Students look around the classroom and call out the items that containing /b/ and/v/ sounds like blackboard, books, notebook, vest, keyboard, tivi, DVD,

**c. Quiz**

Teacher says the whole sentence. Students choose the correct words.

- I need a (*vote/boat*)
- It is my (*best/vest*)
- Is this a very big (*bat/vat*)?

**d. Tongue twisters**

Create fun and fluency by saying the following sentences aloud with concentration on the sounds /b/ and /v/.

*Five of seven books are very bad*

*The baby at the river has a van toy.*

*Under the bed was a ribbon, a valise, and a live bird.*

*That building is absolutely beautiful and valuable.*

*It is the most interesting bible I have ever thought.*

**e. Information gap exercises**

You sit opposite your partner. Your partner will ask you which words goes into the empty boxes. You will pronounce the word in your box, and your partner will write down what you said. Then you ask your partner to pronounce the words in your missing boxes.

Possible questions:

“Can you tell me the word which is in B3?”

“Could you repeat that please?”

A

A1	blouse	A2		A3	Valley	A4	driving
B1		B2		B3	Brown	B4	
C1	living	C2		C3	web	C4	
D1		D2	village	D3		D4	bell

**B**

A1		A2	vowel	A3		A4	
B1	vain	B2	borrow	B3		B4	brave
C1		C2	vague	C3		C4	bark
D1	absent	D2		D3	verve	D4	

**f. Stories**

Read the following story. Repeat as many times as your partner needs. Ask your partner repeat if necessary.

**A**

*Living in a beautiful villa by Halong Bay, Bao loves to dive down the lovely sea on every bright day. She and her big brother like to see vessel because it brings a range of fish to the harbor.*

**B**

*In November, 2005, Bich and Vinh, two of my best friends, went to Bang Forest. They saw a plenty of birds there, consisted of blackbirds, blue tit, robin...Bich wanted to buy a robin as a souvenir.*

**g. Songs**

Students sing and dance following the videos.

*/b/sound*

B is a consonant, a letter in the alphabet B, B, B, B, B (B Sound) I know a boy He has a ball He likes to bounce To the beat B, B, B, B, B (B Sound) I read a book About a bear Who had a boat And it was big B, B, B, B, B (B Sound) Write an uppercase B in the air Write a lowercase b in the air B, B, B, B, B (B Sound) B is a consonant, a letter in the alphabet

Adopted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5D3ySh7s2c>

*/v/sound*

V is a consonant, a letter in the alphabet /v/, /v/, /v/, /v/ (V Sound) We drove a van On a vacation To a village In a valley /v/, /v/, /v/, /v/ (V Sound) I saw a video Of a viper Giving venom To a vulture /v/, /v/, /v/, /v/ (V Sound) Write an uppercase V in the air Write a lowercase v in the air /v/, /v/, /v/, /v/ (V Sound) V is a consonant, a letter in the alphabet

Adopted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1BeBFqwyFc>

## **II. Homework**

Note that if you are practicing by yourself, try saying both words and making sure your pronunciation of each is different, for example by looking at your mouth shape in the mirror or recording and then listen to it again.

### **Practice by singing some more songs**

\* /b/ sound

Let's Learn About the Alphabet Let's Learn About the Letter V Get ready, get set, Let's Learn About the Alphabet (Chorus) 26 letters, that's it, Let's Learn About the Alphabet Let's learn about the letter B B is a letter, b is a letter, b is a letter B is a letter in the alphabet This is an uppercase B, write it in the air like this This is an uppercase B, write it in the air like this This is a lowercase b, write it in the air like this This is a lowercase b, write it in the air like this Get ready, get set, Let's Learn About the Alphabet Letter b is a consonant and it has a sound Letter b is a consonant and it has a sound I say the b sound /b/ - /b/ /b/ /b/ /b/ Now you say the b sound /b/ - /b/ /b/ /b/ /b/ At the beginning of these words Listen for the b sound /b/ There was a bunny, bunny, bunny With a basket, basket, basket Who rode a bicycle, bicycle, bicycle To pick some berries, berries, berries At the end of these words Listen for the b sound /b/ There was a crab, crab, crab Who had a job, job, job To fix the tub, tub, tub And the knob, knob, knob It's fun to learn about the alphabet And I'm really gonna' try and do my best Learn each letter, learn each sound Learn how to write each letter down I feel so good deep inside I'm proud I'm learning, to read and write

Adopted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1bcER1Zzak>

\* /v/ sound

Let's Learn About the Alphabet Let's Learn About the Letter V Get ready, get set, Let's Learn About the Alphabet (Chorus) 26 letters, that's it, Let's Learn About the Alphabet Let's learn about the letter V V is a letter, k is a letter, k is a letter V is a letter in the alphabet This is an uppercase V, write it in the air like this This is an uppercase V, write it in the air like this This is a lowercase v, write it in the air like this This is a lowercase v, write it in the air like this Get ready, get set, Let's Learn About the Alphabet Letter v is a consonant and it has a sound Letter v is a consonant and it has a sound I say the v sound /v/ - /v/ /v/ /v/ /v/ Now you say the k sound /v/ - /v/ /v/ /v/ /v/ At the beginning of these words Listen for the v sound /v/ My Grampa puts on his visor, visor, visor And his favorite vest, vest, vest When he drives his van, van, van To watch me play volleyball, volleyball, volleyball In the middle of these words Listen for the v sound /v/ A little white dove, dove, dove Flew in the sky above, above, above Then he made a dive, dive, dive And landed on my sleeve, sleeve, sleeve It's fun to learn about the alphabet And I'm really gonna' try and do my best Learn each letter, learn each sound Learn how to write each letter down I feel so good deep inside I'm proud I'm learning, to read and write (Chorus)

Adopted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZjEtwr8Q4o>