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INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF PRAAT ON VIETNAMESE EFL STUDENTS' INTONATION

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of English language teaching and learning, pronunciation and particularly intonation play a crucial role in conveying clear messages; however, Vietnamese EFL students often face significant challenges due to focusing excessively on individual sounds while overlooking suprasegmental features. To address this gap, this study evaluates the impact of Praat software - a visual feedback tool - on improving English intonation proficiency as well as the attitudes and feedback of Vietnamese EFL students toward its integration. Through this investigation, the research aims to propose effective technology-integrated solutions for instruction and self-practice in English intonation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the common intonation deviations made by Vietnamese EFL students?
2. How does the use of Praat software impact Vietnamese EFL students' English intonation competence?
3. What are Vietnamese EFL students' attitudes and feedback toward using Praat in practicing English intonation?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English Intonations

- Suprasegmental feature involving systematic variation in pitch (Cruttenden, 1997).
- Four patterns: falling, rising, fall-rise, and rise-fall.
- Contributes to meaning, communicative intent, and naturalness (Wells, 2006; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Intonation Deviations

- Inappropriate pitch movement.
- Reversed pitch movement.
- Simplification / overcomplication.
- Monotone delivery.

Praat & Visual Feedback

- Acoustic analysis software developed by Boersma & Weenink.
- Visualizes pitch contours for analysis and comparison.
- Supports learners' self-monitoring and self-correction.
- Previous studies reported positive effects on pronunciation/intonation learning (Le & Brook, 2011; El-Garawany, 2021; Nurjanah et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

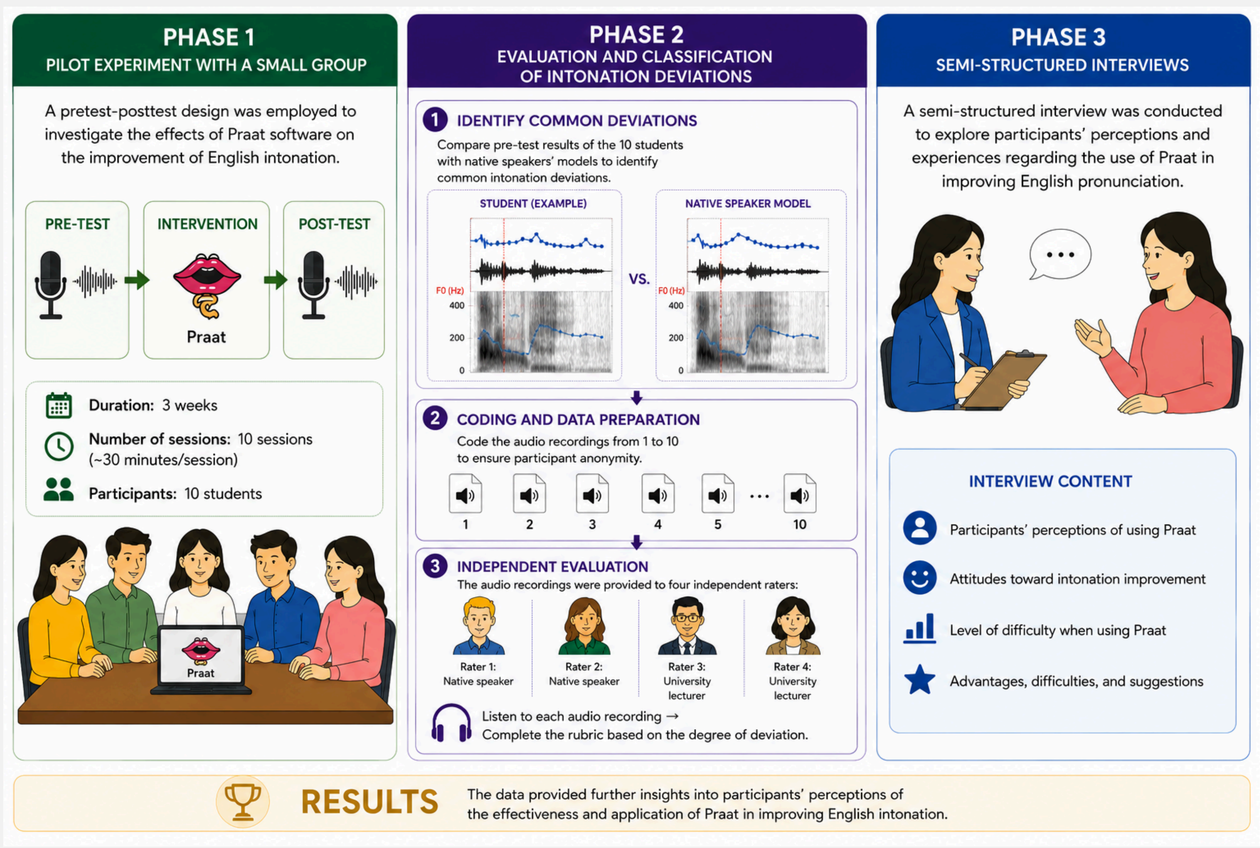
Research participants

- 10 students from the Faculty of English, University of Foreign Languages, Hue University.
- 3-week experimental intervention

Research instruments

- Participant selection questionnaire
- Test
- Practice exercises
- Participant interview questions
- Intonation rating form for native speakers and lecturers

Data collection



KEY FINDINGS

1. Common Intonation Deviation Patterns:

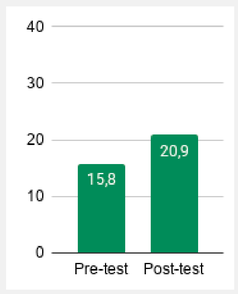
(1) Excessive pitch exaggeration
(2) Oversimplified intonation contours
(3) Inverted pitch trajectory
(4) Monotonous speech delivery
(5) Inappropriate falling pitch regardless of communicative context

2. Divergence in Rater Assessments:

- Native English Speakers: Prioritized ease of understanding; simplified intonation contours and context-free falling tones were still rated highly for intelligibility and message transmission.
- Vietnamese Instructors: Emphasized academic correctness; utterances deviating from textbook intonation rules received lower scores, despite maintaining communicative value.
- Consensus: Both rater groups gave lower ratings to deviation types (1) and (3) because they undermined the naturalness of speech.

3. Effectiveness of Praat in Improving Intonation

- Mean score showed clear improvement:



- More stable intonation performance reflected by reduced standard deviation:

	Standard deviation
Pre-test	5,41
Post-test	4,23

- Paired-samples t-test demonstrated statistically significant improvement:

t	*df*	*p*
-3,27	9	0,01

4. Positive Student Perceptions towards Praat:

- *Prior Experience:* 100% had never previously used dedicated software for intonation practice.
- *Self-Confidence & Awareness:* 100% felt more confident and observed distinct improvements in real-world communication.
- *Visual Feedback Utility:* Praat's visual pitch contours were highly valued for practicing interrogative sentence structures and pitch adjustments.
- *Technology Acceptance:* 60% rated Praat as more practical than traditional theoretical learning; 60% intended to continue using the software in the future.
- *Learning Curve:* Initial difficulty in reading pitch contours was gradually resolved with proven training efficacy.

IMPLICATIONS

For Pedagogical Practice:

- Integrate Praat/Electronic Visual Feedback into Phonetics–Phonology modules to allow students to visualize suprasegmental elements instead of relying solely on auditory perception.
- Build "instructional scaffolding" by providing standardized model samples and guiding students in self-practice.
- Adopt flexible assessment criteria that balance theoretical accuracy with natural intelligibility.

For Students (Autonomous Learners):

- Proactively shift learning methods: move beyond vowels and consonants to prioritize suprasegmental features (stress, intonation).
- Utilize Praat as a "mirror" to self-diagnose and correct personal pronunciation issues.
- Select and target personal difficult intonation patterns to optimize practice time.

For Future Research:

- Expand the sample size to enhance representative validity.
- Further investigate the divergence between textbook theory and authentic communicative language (emphasizing pragmatic use).

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