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# CAMBODIAN STUDENTS' CHALLENGES WITH ENGLISH WORD STRESS AND STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH PRONOUNCING WORD STRESS

Sekkhapirath Set<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Word stress plays an important role in intelligibility and deserves to be studied in all English classes, not just pronunciation classes, and by all students, regardless of their general language proficiency level. At a word level, stress in English is phonemic since the location of the stress can differentiate the meaning of words. Mispronouncing word stress can cause miscommunication. The aim of this study is to explore Cambodian students' problems with pronouncing English word stress in an institute of technology and to assess the effectiveness of four word-stress teaching strategies. The participants were 23 students studying English at an institute of technology and ten English teachers were recruited for this study. After screening the participants, 15 students were given four stress-learning methods as a supplement to a 48-hour English course. The learners were pre- and post-tested by the researcher. Interviews were conducted twice, before and after the instructions. Results indicate that most participants had problems with four-syllable words. The findings also revealed that the rubber band strategy was the most suitable strategy to teach word stress.*

**Keywords:** *word stress, stress-teaching strategies, word stress instructions*

## INTRODUCTION

There are many features to consider when teaching English pronunciation. Among all these are stress patterns. Many cases of misunderstanding, confusion and changing meaning are caused because the speaker does not use the correct stress pattern of words or sentences (Raupp, 2010). The incorrect use of stress patterns by non-native speakers is due to the different stress patterns of each language. According to Schiller (1994) all native Khmer words are stress final, so it is not phonemic. Moreover, Ehrman and Kem (1972) discovered that most original Khmer words are typically one or two syllables long. However, due to extensive borrowing from Pali and Sanskrit, Cambodian now has numerous polysyllabic words, especially in formal and educated contexts. Regardless, the primary stress consistently falls on the final syllable of the word, as seen in examples such as បិទ /bət/ 'to close,' ទន្លេ /túnlee/ 'river,' មករា /me'kəraa/ 'January,' and បច្ចុប្បន្នភាព /paccobonphiəp/ 'current events.' In polysyllabic words, stressed and unstressed syllables alternate, as illustrated by ភោជនីយដ្ឋាន /phooceniyəthaaŋ/ 'restaurant.' In compound words (formed by combining two or more words), each component maintains its stress pattern, as seen in ភាពយន្ត /phiəpyún/ 'moving picture' or វិទ្យាពេទ្យ /wiccia peet/ 'subject of medicine'. In contrast to Khmer, word stress rules are much more complex in English. Halle and Keyser

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(1971) present less regularity than for the language cited above. There is little understanding of Cambodian students' problems in pronouncing English word stress.

English native speakers rely on word stress to recognize isolated words as well as words on the sentence level (Benrabah, 1997). Understanding stress patterns in English is particularly important for speakers of other languages whose stress rules are more regular and/or different and thus interfere with comprehensibility (Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, effective word stress teaching is very crucial for L2 learners.

Teaching English pronunciation is essential, highlighting the need for English instructors to understand efficient strategies for teaching and learning word stress. This knowledge helps guide English learners effectively, reducing potential pronunciation errors, particularly at higher levels of English proficiency during communication. Therefore, this research provides English teachers with understanding of the word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners and strategies that are most used by those learners.

Some studies on aspects of pronunciation, mainly on word stress, have been conducted in Cambodia. For example, a study on the main features of Cambodian pronunciation by Henderson (1952) revealed that Cambodian pronunciation uses two registers (pitch levels) that affect the entire syllable and influence vowel quality. The first register has a higher pitch and "normal" or "head" voice quality. The second register has a lower pitch and a deeper, breathy, or "sepulchral" voice quality. However, there might not be many researchers paying a special attention to the area of pronunciation, particularly, pronouncing word stress. Wrong pronunciation of word stress may hinder students from communicating effectively. Keuk (2009) found that four factors such as pronunciation, word choice, grammar, and cultural differences limit the intelligibility of Cambodian English variety and could lead to communication breakdowns. Pronunciation and word choices mostly cause communication problems because 91% of 123 participants agreed that pronunciation was the common factor that causes miscommunication. However, specific features of pronunciation were not addressed in his study. Moreover, there are very few studies on the use of word stress learning and teaching strategies in the Cambodian context.

Therefore, the current study aims at investigating pronouncing word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners and improving EFL learners' competence at the institute of technology. With a greater awareness of the English word stress problems Cambodian students face, teachers of English will be in a better position to help students improve their ability to perceive the stressed syllable of words and produce English words with correct stress placement. With the teachers' help, Cambodian students will be able to communicate in English more effectively.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of word stress

Stress means that one syllable is singled out to be pronounced louder and longer than other syllables. According to Roach (2009), "from this point of view, all stressed syllables have one characteristic in common, and that is prominence. Stressed syllables are recognized as stressed because they are more prominent than unstressed syllables" (p. 73). Similarly, according to Fry

(1958), stress is the result of the interaction of pitch, intensity, and duration. A stressed syllable is often louder and longer than an unstressed syllable. Stress gives a certain basic prominence to the syllables, and hence to the words, on which it is used, and incidentally assists in avoiding monotony.

Roach (2009) suggested two ways of identifying the characteristics of stressed syllables: one is to consider what the speaker does in producing stressed syllables, and the other is to consider the characteristics of sound from a listener's perspective. In other words, stress can be studied from the points of view of production and of perception; the two are obviously closely related but are not identical. It is generally believed that the production of stress depends on the speaker using more muscular energy than is used for unstressed syllables. In contrast, from the perceptual point of view, all stressed syllables have one characteristic in common, which is prominence. Similarly, Ladefoged and Johnson (2011) explained that stress in English is produced by (1) increased activity of the respiratory muscles, producing greater loudness as well as by (2) exaggeration of consonant and vowel properties, such as vowel height and stop aspiration, and (3) exaggeration of pitch so that low pitches are lower and high pitches are higher.

According to Roach (2009) there are three levels of word stress. First, the prominence that results from this pitch movement, or tone, gives the strongest type of stress; this is called primary stress. For example, the word 'around' ə'raʊnd, the stress always falls clearly on the last syllable and the first syllable is weak. Second, the secondary stress is weaker than primary stress but stronger than that of the first syllable of 'around'; for example, consider the words 'photographic' /fəʊtəgrəfɪk/, 'anthropology' /ənθrəpələdʒi/. These two words can be transcribed as /,ənθrə'pələdʒi/, /,fəʊtə'grəfɪk/. Third, the unstressed syllable is regarded as being the absence of any recognizable amount of prominence. Phonetic realization of stress seems to vary considerably across languages, being expressed in terms of amplitude, pitch, duration, and vowel quality. Normally, stressed syllables have a higher pitch and a greater duration and amplitude according to Odden (2005). Next, studies about word stress learning strategies utilized by students and word stress instruction practiced by EFL teachers will be addressed.

### **Studies related to students learning word stress strategies**

English is not the same as other languages where word stress can be decided simply in relation to the syllables of the word, as can be done in Czech (where the first syllable is usually stressed) and Khmer (where the last syllable is usually stressed) (Ehrman & Kem, 1972). EFL learners are often advised to learn the stress pattern of individual new words that they come across (Roach, 2009). Witalisz (2014) found that even though English word stress is largely unpredictable, learners tend to use various strategies to create a consistent system that helps them acquire new English words.

Vitanova and Miller (2002) found that adults can see improvement in both segmental and suprasegmental areas of pronunciation. However, once students have mastered the basic sounds of English and identified some of the supra-segmental differences between their L1 and English, it is time to help them learn some strategies so that they can study more effectively on their own.

In Thailand, Yangklang (2013) investigated the improvement of English stress and intonation pronunciation of first-year students at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University. Forty students

from the English major at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat were randomly selected. They took a pretest to classify their abilities before using the program, and then they took a post-test after four weeks. This study found that the students improved their pronunciation after using the e-learning program. In addition, the research findings showed that all students were satisfied with the e-learning program. According to Crutten (2014), better learning of pronunciation often takes place when students develop a positive attitude toward both the task and the method used to enhance good pronunciation patterns.

### **Studies related to teaching pronunciation techniques**

There are several approaches and techniques to teach pronunciation. In accordance with the different approaches to teaching pronunciation, the bottom-up approach begins with the articulation of individual sounds and works up towards intonation, stress, and rhythm. On the other hand, the top-down approach begins with patterns of intonation and brings separate sounds into sharper focus as and when required. In the bottom-up approach, the central idea is that if you teach the segments first, the suprasegmental features will be subsequently acquired without the need for formal instruction. In the top-down approach, however, the assumption is that once the prosodic features are in place, the necessary segmental discriminations will follow (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). They also suggested that certain aspects of English pronunciation, such as sounds and stress, seem to be easily taught, while others, such as intonation, are extremely dependent on individual circumstances and thus practically impossible to separate out for direct teaching.

Besides top-down and bottom-up approaches, intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic approaches are of great importance for teaching segmental features. According to Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1996), the intuitive-imitative approach to teaching pronunciation is based on learners' ability to listen and imitate the rhythm and sounds of the language without being given any explicit information. Technologies such as audiotapes, videos, computer-based programs, and websites are used today to implement this approach.

There is another approach called the integrative approach, which focuses on the suprasegmentals of stress, rhythm, and intonation as practiced in discourse beyond the phoneme and word level. According to Lee (2008), pronunciation in this approach is integrated with and practiced within meaningful task-based activities; pronunciation is considered "an integral component of communication, rather than an isolated drill" (p. 1).

Jenkins (2000) suggested practice activities for specific target sounds, such as minimal pair exercises and drilling, as well as the rules of contrastive and nuclear stress, which will facilitate learners moving from receptive to productive competence in core problematic areas. However, it is doubtful that these types of tasks will promote pronunciation skills or motivation in the language classroom.

Some researchers have conducted studies about teaching pronunciation techniques. Scarcella and Oxford (1994) gathered 11 techniques for teaching pronunciation. They are as follows: self-monitoring, tutorial sessions and self-study, modeling and individual correction, communication activities, written versions of oral presentations, computer-assisted language learning, explanations, utilization of known sounds, incorporation of novel elements, communication strategies, and



affective strategies. Noll and Collins (2002) showed their strategies in pronunciation error correction as finger correction strategies and using mime and gesture strategies. Bohlke (2016) suggested the following strategies to teach word stress: grouping by stress pattern, word stress bingo, and scavenger hunt.

The existing study provides a comprehensive overview of word stress definition and its levels according to prominent scholars like Roach (2009) and Ladefoged and Johnson (2011). However, a research gap exists concerning the practical application of word stress learning strategies among Cambodian EFL learners and the teaching techniques employed by EFL instructors in this context. While the study acknowledges the variability of stress realization across languages and emphasizes the importance of learners' strategies, such as those mentioned by Witalisz (2014), it does not delve deeply into specific strategies beneficial for Cambodian learners. Moreover, although the study touches on different teaching approaches and techniques for pronunciation instruction, it lacks a focused exploration of how these techniques, especially those highlighted by Scarcella and Oxford (1994), Noll and Collins (2002), and Bohlke (2016), are implemented or could be adapted to effectively teach word stress to Cambodian EFL learners. Addressing this gap would significantly contribute to enhancing word stress acquisition and teaching methodologies in the Cambodian EFL context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research objectives and research questions**

The goals of this paper were to gain a better understanding about problems of pronouncing word stress among Cambodian university students, and to explore strategies dealing with pronouncing word stress. To reach these objectives, this research aimed to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners?*
- (2) How do Cambodian EFL learners utilize word stress learning strategies?*

### **Research design**

This study employed experimental research design. According to Creswell (2012), "in an experiment, you test an idea (or practice or procedure) to determine whether it influences an outcome or dependent variable" (p.195). The four word-stress instructions were integrated into English sessions to year-three students. The pretest and posttest were used to address the first research question. A pretest provides a measure on some attributes or characteristics that participants are assessed in an experiment before they receive a treatment while posttest measures some attribute or characteristic that is assessed for participants in an experiment after a treatment (Creswell, 2012).

The qualitative data were used to answer the second research questions: How do Cambodian EFL learners utilize word stress learning strategies? According to Kumar (2014), "The main focus in qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people." (p. 132-33). Since this study aimed to investigate the word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners, a qualitative approach was the right choice.

### **Population and sample size**

This study was conducted at an institute of technology in Cambodia. A class of twenty-three students was chosen to participate in this experimental study. The researcher used convenience sampling to recruit the sample. They were from different departments, five students from Food Technology and Chemical Engineering (GCA), two students from Communication Engineering (GIC), seven students from Industrial and Mechanical Engineering (GIM), and nine students from Geotechnical Engineering (GRU). Six students were female, and seventeen students were male.

In the first phase, 23 students voluntarily registered for this experimental study; however, only 15 students fully participated throughout the entire procedure. Therefore, in the second phase, data from these 15 students were used to support this research study. 10 part-time English teachers were purposively selected for the interviews. They were teaching English subjects to second year to fifth-year students at the institute of technology. The participants were contacted and interviewed individually.

### **Data collection tools**

In this experimental study, two research instruments were employed to investigate word stress patterns and strategies among EFL learners and teachers. The first instrument utilized word stress tests from the *New Headway Intermediate Students' Book* by Liz and Jonh Soars (2015), with word selections based on frequency of occurrence. Four word-stress patterns were examined: two-syllable words with primary stress on the first and second syllable, three-syllable words with primary stress on the first and second syllable, and four-syllable words with primary stress occurring after a prefix or before a suffix. The second instrument involved a semi-structured interview adapted from Fischler (2005), comprising pre-interview and post-interview sessions with EFL learners, and interviews with ten university English teachers. The interviews explored various aspects such as participants' experiences with pronunciation instruction, awareness of stress in English, strategies used to cope with stress, teaching practices related to word stress, and perceptions regarding the impact of stress pronunciation on intelligibility. These research tools provided comprehensive insights into word stress acquisition and teaching strategies within EFL contexts.

### **Data collection procedure**

The data collection process involved six sessions where participants received instruction on word stresses. Each session began with a 60-minute lesson plan prepared by the researcher, outlining lesson objectives and procedures. The sessions progressed through warm-up activities, controlled practice stages, rule presentations, and quizzes, focusing on different aspects of word stress rules. Sessions 1 and 6 included pre- and post-interviews along with pre- and posttests, respectively, ensuring comprehensive data collection before and after instruction. Participants' consent was obtained through signed consent forms, and anonymity was maintained using pseudonyms. The structured approach encompassed various instructional strategies such as word card exercises, hangman games, group discussions, and creative conversations, reinforcing stress patterns in two-, three-, and four-syllable words. Each session built upon previous learning, culminating in a comprehensive assessment of participants' understanding through quizzes and interviews.

## Data analysis

The data obtained from the student participants in three stages of data collection were analyzed by using SPSS software program version 23.0 for research question 1. SPSS 23.0 was used to determine whether the mean differences between them were significant. To answer research question 2, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 student participants in the third year of study and with 10 university teachers who were teaching English subject at the institute of technology. The interview data were transcribed by using NVIVO software program version 10.2.2. Transcribed data, consisting of 55 pages in total, were subjected to content analysis. The responses from both groups of participants were carefully transcribed and analyzed to identify the main themes of the research questions.

## Ethical consideration

To get data for this study, the researcher first sent a permission letter to the head of the English Section at the institute of technology to request official permission to conduct the study. The permission letter briefly outlined the purposes of the study and the procedure of the experiment. An approval letter was also attached to the permission letter to certify that the researcher was conducting thesis research under the supervision of his supervisor.

After receiving permission from the head of the English Section, the participants were contacted individually. Participants were given the consent form that briefly explained the purposes of the study, benefits for participants, and procedures of the study. Additionally, participants' names would not be shown and would be substituted with pseudonyms.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The major purposes of this experimental study were to gain a better understanding of word stress problems among Cambodian EFL learners, and to explore learning strategies that are most frequently utilized by Cambodian EFL learners.

### What are the word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners?

Data was collected from 10 teacher participants and 15 student participants. The data was used to identify the main problems of Cambodian learners face with pronouncing word stress. To obtain reliable data, the researcher decided to interview 10 English teachers and 15 student participants. Since few participants did not complete all the procedures of the experiment, 15 participants were selected out of 23 participants. The following were the responses of the participants on the three themes:

#### *Theme 1: Segmental problems encountered by Cambodian EFL learners*

In response to question 1, three participants (S2, S1 and S15) had problem with consonant sounds such as /θ/, /ʃ/, /s/, /r/, and /l/. Four other participants (S6, S8, S7, and S14) did not know how to pronounce the new words that they had never met before. Only two participants (S3 and S12) raised the problem with intonation and stress.

*“For my problem with pronunciation like for me with TH sound [I: oh /θ/ sound] yes yes”. (S1)*

*“I have a lot of problems like the problem with word /f/ and /θ/ sound.” (S2)*

*“The problem with the pronunciation is the new word I did not know I have never seen before, so I don’t know how to pronounce so I need to check the dictionary or ask the teacher how to pronounce.” (S8)*

*“Yes, I have a lot of problems with pronunciation such as new words and some word such Er the Record. It is the same writing but different functions.” (S14)*

This showed that some of the participants had problems with consonant sounds which do not exist in Khmer language. For example, S2 pointed out that he had a lot of problems with the words with the sound “sh” and “th”. Participants usually struggled with new words that they have never encountered before. For instance, S8 said that he did not know how to pronounce new words that he has never seen before. The two participants revealed that they faced problems with intonation and stress. S12 added that he had problems like intonation and stress, and he could not pronounce words correctly. Bounchan and Moore (2010) explained that English and Khmer have different phonologies, so some Khmer learners of English may have difficulty pronouncing certain English sounds. There are no sounds as follow in Khmer: ʃ [as in pleasure], ʃt [as in teacher], θ [as in the], and ð [as in that]. Thus, students may produce the following substitutions:

- /s/ as ʃ
- /z/ as ʃt
- /s/ as θ
- /d/ as ð

#### *Theme 2: Word stress problems encountered by Cambodian EFL learners*

It was noticed that most teacher participants raised the same problem concerning of their students. Eight teacher participants (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T9 and T10) revealed that their students do not know where to place the stress in words. Fossilization was another problem raised by T7. He shared the idea that his current students are adult learners, so it is hard for them to pronounce the word correctly. He agreed that young students tend to learn pronunciation more easily. In short, participants shared similar opinions about the problems Cambodian learners face with pronouncing word stress.

*“Er what I have noticed from ITC students is that they are adult so somehow, they find it hard to pronounce correctly, they are extinct we can say. They used to pronounce that word s for a long time, so it become fossilization something so it’s difficult to change to another pronunciation. [I: you believe that when the students are young, they learn pronunciation better] yes.” (T7)*

#### *Theme 3: Persisting problems of word stress after instructions*

After applying four teaching word strategies in class, the researcher interviewed students to further explore their remaining problems with word stress. Five student participants mentioned that they still had problems with four-syllable words. Most of them could not remember the rules of each word stress.

*“I still have problem with four syllable words I can remember it well.” (S2)*

*“Er my problem is that I’m not the foreigner native speaker so I can’t pronounce it correctly. Four syllable word is most difficult one.” (S10)*

*“Er problem that I have are words I did not see before, so I still don’t know how to pronounce them.” (S9)*

*“Sometimes there is a new word that it is not pronounced through the alphabet I sometimes pronounce wrong the alphabet, so it is hard.” (S13)*

The rest participants ( $n = 4$ ) mentioned that they still had problems with three-syllable words. They explained that the rules of three-syllable word stress were complicated. Four syllable-words tends to remain problematic due to the lack of instruction from teachers and the four syllable-word rule is very different from Khmer language rules. According to Henderson (1953) the characteristics of Khmer word-formation are monosyllables and disyllables of certain given patterns. Disyllabic words (words with two syllables) have recessive stress, e.g., ‘finish, ‘answer, be’hind, re’sult.

The first research question concerned with the word stress problems of Cambodian EFL learners. Overall, the findings of the study showed that most students did not know how to place stress on words (from teacher perceptions) and most student participants had problems with four-syllable word stress. This could be the result of the influence of the learners’ mother tongues. Anani (1989) conducted a study to investigate the English stress placement of Arab learners of English to see whether the incorrect stress placement of Arab learners of English was influenced by the negative transfer of the mother tongue. Another study done by Bourjan (2003) investigated problems in the English word stress placement of Mattayomsuksa six (grade twelve) students. The participants were ten Mattayomsuksa six students in Mahasarakham. The instruments were word lists that contained polysyllabic words categorized into four groups: (a) verbs, (b) nouns, (c) adjectives, and (d) adverbs. The participants were asked to read each word list. The primary stressed syllable of each word pronounced by each participant was checked. The results of the study showed that the students had problems with word stress in all word types tested. All the students gave every syllable an equal stress, which is incorrect. Bourjan concluded that the influence of the mother tongue was a probable cause of the problem. Bounchan and Moore (2010) stated that “unlike English, Khmer does not have stress within individual words, partly because most Khmer words are monosyllabic” (p. 113).

### **How do Cambodian EFL learners utilize word stress learning strategies?**

In answering the research question 2, the data was collected from both student and teacher participants. Data was gathered from both pre- and post-interviews of both group participants and mean scores of four quizzes. The following were results of pre- and posttests, mean scores of the four quizzes, and the responses of the participants on the three themes.

**Table 1. Paired Samples Test**

Tests	Mean	Std.	T	Df	Significance (2-tailed)
Pretest	8.00	2.699	-3.151	14	.007
Posttest	11.07	2.890			

**Table 1** is a Paired Samples T-test. This table shows that  $p < .0035$ , which is smaller than .05. In fact, the  $t$ -value= -3.151 tells us that the pretest has a smaller mean than the posttest. Therefore, it could be concluded that word stress instructions help students learn word stress better,  $t(14) = -3.151, p < .05$ .

Drawing from the findings, there was an increase of the mean score from pretest to post test score, indicating that the score has been improved. Additionally, the statistics from the paired samples test show that the four teaching word stress strategies have contributed to students’ performance. The findings of this study are supported by Gilbert’s (1994) rubber band technique for practicing primary stress. Moreover, among the four strategies, student participants received the highest mean score in quiz B (Rubber Band).

**Table 2. Compared Mean Scores of four Quizzes**

Strategies	N	Quizzes	Mean
Word Card	15	A	11.40
Rubber Band	15	B	<b>14.07</b>
Backward	15	C	13.33
Dictionary	15	D	10.80

**Table 2** summarizes the mean score of the four quizzes, categorized according to the following four teaching strategies: word card, rubber band, backward, and dictionary. The highest mean was quiz B which was 14.07. In contrast, the participants did not do well on the quiz D, which the mean was 10.80. From teachers’ perspective, although a dictionary is a useful tool to check the right pronunciation, especially stress, most students do not know how to read the phonetic syllable.

*Theme 1: Word stress learning strategies of Cambodian EFL learners*

When asked what strategies, if any, they used to deal with word stress in English, out of the ten participants, seven mentioned that watching English movies and listening to English songs helped them improve their pronunciation of word stress. The remaining three participants mentioned that they had no idea about strategies to deal with pronouncing word stress. Additionally, three participants explained that they learned word stress best by using a dictionary.

*“I have my strategy is Er watch the English movie and try to make my sound like the movie.” (S5)*

*“The strategy that I use to learn the stress is that I used to watch American movies and I tried to listen to English songs, and then I tried to watch the public speaking.” (S12)*

*Theme 2: Effective word stress learning for Cambodian students*

When asked about effective learning activities for learning word stress, nine participants indicated that they used a dictionary because it provides clear explanations, and they could also listen to pronouncing sounds in an electronic dictionary.



*“For me, check dictionary because in dictionary has clear pronunciation.” (S4)*

*“I can learn the word stress by listening to the word in the dictionary and try to pronounce it like the dictionary has.” (S13)*

### *Theme 3: Teachers’ teaching strategies of word stress*

The teacher participants were also asked about the teaching strategies they had used to teach word stress. Three mentioned that they recommend their students to check a dictionary either a paper one or an electronic one.

Those teachers ( $n = 5$ ) who did not recommend their students to use a dictionary, some mentioned using the tape recordings. They did not state any specific teaching strategies but mentioned teaching their students directly by following some certain steps: first, asking students to read certain words, and second, playing a cassette player and asking students to repeat after it.

*“First I ask them to read through the text and I ask some students to pronounce certain words and then I play the listening and let them compare their pronunciation from the listening and their pronunciation and then after that I would stop the listening and I ask them to repeat and next I might play it again and then pause it and then ask students to repeat again.” (T7)*

The rest ( $n = 2$ ) mentioned two different kinds of teaching strategies: first, T5 corrected his students’ mistakes on spots. Second, T10 followed the authentic materials. She did not state clearly about authentic materials; however, she may refer to the tape and books.

*“My strategy, first I correct them on spots mean that whenever they pronounce some words wrong in term of pronunciation especially stress, I have to correct them on the spots but I don’t correct them all the time, example when I ask them to practice pronouncing words, I correct them, but in free speaking practice, I don’t correct them, I have to correct them later” (T5)*

The third research question aimed to identify word stress learning strategies that are most frequently utilized by Cambodian EFL learners. In this regard, the findings revealed that rubber bands were most effective for three-syllable words with the primary stress on the first and second syllable. Lin *et al.*, (1995) mentioned rubber band is an effective word stress learning strategy. Gilbert (1994) had said that it provides a visual image of the variable length of the syllables as well as a kinesthetic tool that mimics the actual effort involved in lengthening a stressed syllable. On the other hand, most of them received the lowest mean score on quiz D (dictionary), even though many claimed that their best strategy was using dictionaries.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provided English teachers with a brief overview of the current situations of English stress teaching and learning in the classroom practice. It is hoped that English teachers at all levels can be encouraged to engage more in teaching English stress in their syllabi. With the findings of this study, English teachers can have clearer ideas about students’ stress error patterns and know more about suitable strategies to practice in the classroom. Furthermore, the result also shed some light on how to use word stress teaching strategies to improve students’ learning.

The findings of the study have implications for various stakeholders in English education. Firstly, English teachers are provided with valuable insight into the current landscape of English stress teaching and learning practices in classrooms. This awareness can inspire teachers across all levels to prioritize and integrate stress teaching more effectively into their syllabi, ultimately enhancing students' pronunciation and speaking skills. By understanding students' stress error patterns and gaining clarity on suitable teaching strategies, teachers can tailor their instruction to address specific learning needs, leading to more effective language acquisition.

The study faced limitations such as a reduced sample size from 23 to 15 participants due to dropouts, impacting result generalizability. The sample drawn from a single institute restricts broader conclusions about Cambodian EFL learners, and convenience sampling introduced potential biases. The study's short duration of six sessions may not fully capture long-term effects on word stress acquisition and retention, and biases in instrument design or administration could influence results. Generalizing identified teaching strategies beyond this context might vary based on different learner populations or teaching environments. Conducting a longitudinal study with diverse participant sampling would reveal the long-term effectiveness of teaching interventions. Combining quantitative tests with qualitative data through a mixed-methods approach, including observations and student reflections, would offer a holistic view of word stress acquisition and strategies.

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### APPENDICES

**Day 1: Lesson plan**

Year: III

Instructor: Mr. SET Sekkhapirath

Lesson Plan Title/Focus/Topic: Two-syllable word stress patterns (the stress on first and second syllable)

Material: worksheets and word cards

Time: 60 minutes

Rom: 302E

Number of students: 23

References: Tips for Teaching Pronunciation by Linda Lane, pp. 22, 2010

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to: define “word stress” means; identify the rules of two syllables in word stress; and appreciate the importance of speaking with correct stress of words through reading the sentences given				
Time	Activity and related analysis & Controlled practice	Step-by-step description	Type of Interaction T→ Ss or Ss → Ss, class/group/pair/ individual	Materials/ technology needed
15 min.	1. Warm up: Motivation/ Activities:	<p>1. Elicit from students the months of the year and the names of the seasons. Write the words on the board. Model the words. Students repeat the words.</p> <p><i>Months</i></p> <p>January    February March      April May        June July        August September October November</p> <p><i>Seasons:</i></p> <p>Winter     Spring Summer    Fall/Autumn</p> <p>2. Ask students</p> <p>. Which words have a stress pattern like September? (Answer October, November, December)</p> <p>. Which word has a stress pattern like January? (Answer: February)</p> <p>. Which words have a stress pattern like April? (Answer: August, Winter, Summer, Autumn)</p>	T→ Ss	Adapted from Tips for Teaching Pronunciation by Linda Lane (22, 2010)

		<p>. How many words have a stress pattern like July? (Answer: just July)</p> <p>. Which words have only one syllable? answer March, May, June, Spring, Fall)</p> <p>3. Erase the words on the board. Model the month names again, stretching the rubber band as you say the stressed vowels. Have the class say the names of the months in order and in reverse order, student by student.</p>		
15 min.	<p>2. Control Practice: word cards</p> <p>The students will develop their knowledge of the two-syllable word stress patterns and produce them in a drill with 90% of accuracy.</p>	<p>T. gives each group a set of word cards with two syllable words and has them discuss how to put the stress on each word and come with possible rules.</p> <p>T. elicits the answers from the Ss. and then put the word on the board into two categories (based on their stress pattern rules). He then reads the words and asks the Ss. to identify the stress in each category. Then he forms the rules of the two-syllable word stress.</p> <p>T. Conducts a drill with the whole class. He reads the words on the board several times. For the first two times, he reads each syllable clearly and slowly, putting a little exaggeration of the stressed syllable and using clapping to indicate the stress. The he reads the words with the stress naturally and has the Ss. repeat after him, first and second times slowly and clearly and using clapping and then naturally.</p>	<p>- SS → Ss (group)</p> <p>- T → Ss (class)</p>	whiteboard, word cards designed by teacher
10 min.	3. Presentation	<p>Word Stress is the prominence given to a syllable or word which makes the word or syllable stand out above the adjacent syllable or word.</p> <p>To stress a syllable, one should read it louder, longer and at a higher pitch.</p> <p>1. two syllable nouns, the stress is usually on the first syllable.</p> <p>2. two syllable verbs, the stress is usually on the last syllable.</p>	T → Ss (class)	whiteboard
10 min.	<p>4. Controlled Practice: Saying the words and sentences</p> <p>The students will be able to distinguish the difference in stress shift for noun-and-verb words with the same spelling and say them with 90% of accuracy.</p>	<p>- Ss. in each group are divided into two pairs. They refer to an exercise on worksheet1. In this task, they are given some words that can be either noun or verb and with two different stress patterns followed by two corresponding sentences. With their partners, they say a word; their partners say the corresponding sentence. They take turns doing this. T. Walk around the class, monitoring and providing feedback where needed.</p>	- SS → Ss (pair)	worksheet 1, designed by teacher
10 min.	5. Quiz	Ss. students are asked to do a ten-minute quiz.	Ss.	quiz 1

**Day 2: Lesson plan**

Year: III

Instructor: Mr. SET Sekkhapirath

Lesson Plan Title/Focus/Topic: Three-syllable word stress patterns primary (the stress on first and second syllable).

Material: worksheets, rubber band

Time: 60 minutes

Rom: 302E

Number of students: 23

References:

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to: identify the rules of three syllables in word stress; and appreciate the importance of speaking with correct stress of words through reading the sentences given.				
Time	Activity and related analysis & Controlled practice	Step-by-step description	Type of Interaction T → Ss or Ss → Ss, class/group/pair/ individual	Materials/ technology needed
5 min.	1. Warm up: Motivation/ Activities:	Hangman game T. chooses a secret three syllable word and draw a blank line for each letter on the whiteboard 1. Ss. Start guessing letters and fill the letter in the blanks if the Ss. guess correctly. ... 2. T. Draws part of the “hangman” when the players guess wrong. Ss. win when they guess the correct word. T. Teacher check the stress of the word with Ss.	T → Ss	whiteboard
15 min.	2. Control Practice: Rubber band The students will develop their knowledge of the three-syllable word stress patterns and produce them in a drill with 90% of accuracy.	T. gives each group a set of word cards with three syllable words and has them discuss how to put the stress on each word and come with possible rules. T. elicits the answers from the Ss. and then puts the word on the board into three categories (based on their stress pattern rules). He then reads the words and asks the Ss. to identify the stress in each category. Then he forms the rules of the three-syllable word stress.	- SS → Ss (group) - T → Ss (class)	Blackboard, word cards designed by teacher

		T. Conducts a drill with the whole class. He reads the words on the board several times. For the first two times, he reads each syllable clearly and slowly, putting a little exaggeration of the stressed syllable and using clapping to indicate the stress. Then he reads the words with the stress naturally and has the Ss. repeat after him, first and second times slowly and clearly and using a rubber band and then naturally.		
10 min.	3. Presentation	- 3 syllable words can have their main stress on the 1st, 2nd or 3rd syllable.	T → Ss	whiteboard
15 min.	4. Controlled Practice: Speaking practice The students will be able to distinguish the difference in stress shift for noun-and-verb words with the same spelling and say them with 90% of accuracy.	- Ss work with a partner and practice saying the words. Give your partner feedback. Get the teacher to help. Put each of these words in a sentence. Write down the sentence below. Now record the word on the whiteboard, followed by the sentence. Listen again and decide if you have pronounced it correctly. Check you have pronounced the unstressed syllables correctly too. Make notes of any difficulties you had.	- SS → Ss (group)	designed by teacher
10 min.	5. Quiz			designed by teacher

### ***Day 3: Lesson plan***

Year: III

Instructor: Mr. SET Sekkhapirath

Lesson Plan Title/Focus/Topic: Prefix word stress patterns

Target Language: “prefix” word stress 4 syllables

Material: worksheets, words card

Time: 60 minutes

Rom: 302E

Number of students: 23

References:

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to:  
identify the rules of prefix word stress patterns; and  
appreciate the importance of speaking with correct stress of words through reading the sentences given

Class Administration (5 minutes):

1. Greeting and checking attendance
2. Asking about their weekend
3. Dealing with late students and absentees

Time	Activity and related analysis & Controlled practice	Step-by-step description	Type of Interaction T→ Ss or Ss → Ss, class/ group/pair/ individual	Materials/ technology needed
5 min.	1. Warm up: Motivation/ Activities:	<p>1. The teacher reads the same sentence to class emphasizing different words every time.</p> <p>I didn't say he stole the money. I didn't say he stole the money. I didn't say he stole the money. I didn't say he stole the money.</p> <p>B. Discussion:</p> <p>1. Were there any differences in how I read the four sentences? 2. Did the meaning change when I stressed the different words?</p> <p>C. Group Activity: Analysis and Reporting</p> <p>Using the task sheets containing examples, each group will identify how to express the meaning indicated in every sentence by speaking the sentence with correct stress.</p>	T→ Ss	whiteboard
10 min.	2. Presentation	- four-syllable words, the stress is usually after the prefix.	T→ Ss	whiteboard
15 min.	3. Control Practice: Backward build up  The students will develop their knowledge of the three-syllable word stress patterns and produce them in a drill with 90% of accuracy.	<p>3. A good technique for helping students hear and pronounce all the syllables in a word with sever syllables is called backward build-up. In this technique the teacher pronounces the last syllable, and the students repeat it. Then you add the preceding syllable, and the students repeat. Continue the sequence until you have pronounced the whole word.</p> <p>Example, if your students are having difficulty with the word trans-por-TA-tion, you model it from the back, forward.</p> <p>T: tion Ss: tion T: TA-tion Ss: TA-tion T: por-TA-tion Ss: por-TA-tion T: trans-por-TA-tion Ss: trans-por-TA-tion</p>	<p>- SS → Ss (group) - T → Ss (class)</p>	Blackboard, word cards designed by teacher
10 min.	4. Presentation	- the stress is usually right after prefix of four syllable words	T→ Ss	

15 min.	5. Controlled Practice: Saying the words and sentences The students will be able to distinguish the difference in stress shift for noun-and-verb words with the same spelling and say them with 90% of accuracy.	- Ss. in each group is divided into two pairs. They refer to a handout of previous practice. In this task, they are given some words that can be either noun or verb and with two different stress patterns followed by two corresponding sentences. With their partners, they say a word; their partners say the corresponding sentence. They take turns doing this. T. Walk around the class, monitoring and providing feedback where needed.	Ss → Ss	
10 min.	6. Quiz			

### ***Day 4: Lesson plan***

Year: III

Instructor: Mr. SET Sekkhapirath

Lesson Plan Title/Focus/Topic: Two-syllable word stress patterns

Target Language: 'suffix' word stress

Material: PowerPoint presentation, worksheets with photos, pictures, rubrics

Time: 60 minutes

Rom: 302E

Number of students: 23

References:

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to: define "word stress" means. identify the rules of two syllables in word stress; and appreciate the importance of speaking with correct stress of words through reading the sentences given				
Class Administration (5 minutes):				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greeting and checking attendance</li> <li>2. Asking about their weekend</li> <li>3. Dealing with late students and absentees</li> </ol>				
Time	Activity and related analysis & Controlled practice	Step-by-step description	Type of Interaction T→ Ss or Ss → Ss, class/ group/pair/ individual	Materials/ technology needed
5 min.	1. Warm up: Motivation/ Activities:	- T. have your students stretch their mouths and face as a warmup. Encourage them to make silly sounds and facial expressions. This can release tension and establish a relaxed atmosphere in the class.	T→ Ss	

15 min.	<p>2. Control Practice: Checking Dictionaries</p> <p>The students will develop their knowledge of the four-syllable word stress patterns and produce them in a drill with 90% of accuracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each student was given a ten-word worksheet.</li> <li>- T. asked them to check the dictionary to find the stress of each word.</li> <li>- T. check the answer by asking students to write answers on the white board.</li> <li>- T. check answers as a whole class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SS → Ss (group)</li> <li>- T → Ss (class)</li> </ul>	<p>Blackboard, word cards designed by teacher</p>
10 min.	<p>3. Presentation</p>	<p>- stress is usually after the suffix of four syllable words.</p>	<p>T→ Ss</p>	
	<p>4. Communicative practice: Creative conversation</p> <p>The students will be able to distinguish the difference in stress shift for noun-and-verb words with the same spelling and say them with 90% of accuracy.</p>	<p>- Ss. work with a partner. They were given two different pieces of paper with a list of words. They stand up, facing each other and holding and showing their paper to each other. They make a conversation in which they make up a past story, using their partners a few times. Then a few volunteer pairs were asked to do their conversation in the class.</p>	<p>Ss→ Ss (pair)</p>	<p>Word list (designed by the teacher) adapted from Kea Sothy</p>
10 min.	<p>5. Quiz</p>			



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