

## Exploring English pronunciation teaching practices at Vietnamese primary schools

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### ABSTRACT

Pronunciation is a crucial factor in the success of English conversations. However, understanding pronunciation teaching methods and the challenges teachers face in EFL countries like Vietnam remains limited, with little research conducted in Vietnamese primary schools. The study explores English pronunciation teaching practices in Vietnamese elementary schools. In particular, it examines teachers' methods of teaching pronunciation to primary school students and delves into teachers' perceptions of pronunciation teaching practices. The study also highlights challenges elementary school English teachers face, presenting results from three Vietnamese teachers conveniently recruited from three different primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings indicate that pronunciation instruction has transitioned to a multisensory and interactive approach, departing from traditional methods. The strategies also include repetition, guided pronunciation practice (i.e., drilling, visual and audio aids, communicative activities, songs and rhymes, tongue twisters, using minimal pairs, and pronunciation software), and a differentiated approach to pronunciation instruction. However, educators recognize challenges related to students' ongoing language, sound development, and motivation issues. The study offers practical insights into effective teaching strategies for English pronunciation in primary schools in Vietnam, providing actionable guidance for primary school educators.

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### 1. Introduction

English has experienced a remarkable surge in popularity, evolving into a global lingua franca (Crystal, 1997). Consequently, it has become one of the most prevalent languages used for intercultural communication worldwide. In the realm of conversation, numerous factors influence communication effectiveness when English is the chosen medium. However, one crucial aspect that significantly impacts communication success is pronunciation. Pronunciation should not be underestimated, as it is a fundamental prerequisite for language proficiency. Ensuring that one's pronunciation is clear and understandable to language learners is essential (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In essence, proficient pronunciation is pivotal in facilitating smooth and effective communication in English, thereby enhancing intercultural understanding and cooperation.

Pronunciation studies show that teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) are responsible for teaching pronunciation effectively. For

instance, Hismanoglu (2006) underscores the importance of pronunciation for oral communication and overall communication skills. Despite its vital role, Morley (1991) observes a lack of emphasis on pronunciation in ESL and EFL programs, emphasizing the need for teachers to address this skill. Morley (1994) suggests that an accent that is too different from a standard can be confusing. Striking a balance is crucial, as a strong English accent may lead to negative perceptions.

Studies investigate pronunciation teaching methods, like drama-based activities and drilling, for effective pronunciation improvement. For example, Korkut and Celik (2018) used dramatic events to create a meaningful context for prioritizing correct pronunciation in their study with Turkish learners of English. Creative theater sessions over six days led to improved pronunciation, especially at the suprasegmental level. Hemei (1997) emphasizes the importance of sensory input, particularly audiovisual aids, for young learners' engagement. Astina (2020) explores the effectiveness of repetition, mainly through drilling, in helping Indonesian fifth-grade students grasp and memorize English content or words.

Despite the existence of studies on pronunciation teaching, the understanding of the methods employed by teachers and the challenges they encounter in teaching pronunciation to young learners in EFL countries, such as Vietnam, is limited. In the Vietnamese formal education system, the instruction of English pronunciation is often overlooked, as highlighted by Nguyen and Newton (2020). Additionally, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the exploration of pronunciation teaching practices in Vietnamese primary schools. Also, little is known about the methods Vietnamese teachers use and the challenges they face when teaching pronunciation to young learners, and so far, just a few studies have explored these issues (e.g., Nguyen & Newton, 2020; Tran et al., 2021). Given the significance of pronunciation in effective communication, it becomes crucial to examine the current approach of Vietnamese teachers in guiding their students on pronunciation. Many Vietnamese students struggle with English pronunciation, posing a potential challenge for foreigners to comprehend them in real-life interactions (Ha, 2005). Therefore, recognizing the critical role of pronunciation in language acquisition, it is imperative to prioritize and incorporate effective pronunciation teaching methods from an early age.

Hence, this study contributes to the existing literature by exploring English pronunciation teaching practices at Vietnamese primary schools. The study seeks to understand elementary school teachers' perceptions of their pronunciation teaching strategies and the difficulties faced by primary school English teachers in teaching pronunciation. The findings contribute significantly to the field by providing essential knowledge and techniques for effectively improving pronunciation teaching abilities among teachers and enhancing students' language skills. Teachers can apply practical strategies to identify and correct common pronunciation errors, develop better teaching methods, and minimize student errors, accelerating English language mastery. The study also highlights specific difficulties elementary school teachers face in the pronunciation teaching process.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What English pronunciation teaching strategies do Vietnamese primary school English teachers use?
2. What challenges do Vietnamese English teachers face when teaching pronunciation to primary school students?

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. Previous research on pronunciation instruction for young learners***

As defined by various scholars, pronunciation encompasses producing English sounds and creating meaning through sound repetition and correction (Cook, 2008). Pronunciation is characterized by three components: intonation, stress, and sound, constituting the process of saying a word (Oxford, 1987). Webster (1989) sees it as the act or outcome of creating speech sounds, incorporating elements like articulation, vowel creation, accent, and inflection. Dauer (1993) delves into developing speech sounds, covering vowel creation, articulation, accent inflection, and intonation, focusing on the appropriateness or acceptance of vocalizations. Overall, pronunciation involves how words are pronounced, encompassing articulation and the generally accepted sound of spoken words.

Previous studies collectively shed light on the nuanced landscape of pronunciation instruction to young learners in EFL settings. Pronunciation instruction for young students is often integrated into texts or tales rather than being explicitly taught. Astina (2020) stresses the importance of teachers possessing both pronunciation expertise and the ability to spark student interest in pronunciation learning by employing diverse strategies and approaches to create a comfortable and engaging learning environment. Nguyen and Newton (2020) investigate the underappreciation of pronunciation instruction. The study utilizes data from video recordings of twelve 45-minute EFL classes and nonparticipant observations. Six Vietnamese EFL instructors from a public university participated in individual interviews, with teaching experience ranging from six to twenty-three years, holding an MA in TESOL or Applied Linguistics. The findings indicate that instructors employed a spontaneous and reactive approach, providing corrective feedback like recasts and prompts for mispronunciations. While the study sheds light on the teaching approaches and challenges faced by Vietnamese EFL instructors, it underscores the lack of emphasis on pronunciation pedagogy in their professional development. This suggests a gap in recognizing and implementing effective pronunciation teaching strategies in EFL classrooms.

Tran et al. (2021) interviewed three educators aged 25 to 35 at the Menglish Center - two male and one female - regarding pronunciation teaching strategies for elementary school students. The study found that these teachers consistently emphasized minimal pairings, integrating audio and visual aids. Techniques such as phonetic transcripts, auditory feedback, and visual reinforcement were employed to help students distinguish between sounds. Visual reinforcement, such as a stress syllabus or a dot below, was utilized to teach intonation and stress. Audio feedback was a standard method to draw attention to mistakes, allowing students to mimic foreigners' sound production and identify errors. However, the study's limited sample size and narrow focus on specific teaching levels create a gap in understanding the broader landscape of pronunciation instruction in EFL settings.

### ***2.2. Practices in pronunciation teaching***

Pronunciation teaching practices involve methodologies, strategies, and techniques to enhance correct pronunciation skills in languages like English. The Common European Framework for Languages (2001) advocates for early pronunciation instruction, stressing the teacher's pivotal role (Council of Europe, 2001). Jenkins (2000) underscores the importance of practical pronunciation training for developing comprehensible spoken language abilities. These practices, incorporating listening exercises, visual aids, contrastive analysis, and integration into various language skills, foster holistic language development.

### *2.2.1. Drilling*

Drilling is the repetitive practice of forming habits. Akinpelu (1981) connects it to conventional teaching methods, notably beneficial for beginners (Astina, 2020). Various types of drills exist, as outlined by Larsen-Freeman (2000), encompassing repetition, chain, backward build-up, transformational, single-slot substitution, multiple-slot substitution, and question-and-answer drills. Repetition drills, where the teacher repeats phrases for students to mimic, offer benefits for inactive learners, including improved pronunciation, boosted confidence, and motivation (Hidayati, 2016). As Larsen-Freeman (2000) described, a chain drill consists of a sequence of questions and answers exchanged among participants, facilitating regulated communication and speech assessment. The backward build-up drill, as outlined by Hermanto (2016), aids students in navigating lengthy dialogues by segmenting them into sections, while the transformational drill involves altering language patterns to enhance comprehension and language flexibility. Single and multiple-slot substitution drills, as explained by Anggraini (2018), concentrate on completing sentence gaps and practicing different conversation line positions. While drilling has advantages for pronunciation improvement, it should be used judiciously to avoid monotony. Combining drilling with other teaching methods, applying it sparingly, and contextualizing it in real-world scenarios enhance its effectiveness (Gilbert, 2012).

### *2.2.2. Visual and audio aids*

Teachers benefit significantly from audiovisual aids in pronunciation instruction, including tools like images and sound-color charts. These aids provide visual and auditory cues, facilitating students' understanding of pronunciation. When employed effectively, visual aids encourage understanding and critical thinking (Kishor, 2003) and offer diverse ways for students to assimilate information, supporting teachers in delivering more polished and consistent lessons. Technical EFL instruction relies on audiovisual aids such as computers, films, and projectors, motivating students to learn a foreign language (Mashrabovna & Sherzodbekovna, 2023). Video captivates students by introducing communication scenarios and enhancing comprehension (Cakir, 2006). Young learners benefit from visual depictions of speech sounds and perfect pronunciation examples through audio aids (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Oxford & Martínez Celdrán, 2011).

### *2.2.3. Communicative activities*

Speech perception, crucial for effective communication, emphasizes the listener's role in discourse (Nooteboom, 1983). Aligning with a shift in pronunciation theory, integrating communicative activities into pronunciation instruction promotes concurrent teaching with communicative practices. These communicative activities, such as games, exercises, and projects involving the target language, are integral components of the communicative approach. The communicative method stresses efficient communication between instructors and students, with various activities enhancing pronunciation (Nguyen & Bui, 2021). Role-playing supports overall communication ability and aids in more accurate pronunciation. Teachers encourage student participation and active engagement in communicative classrooms, fostering a positive learning environment. Creative task design involving pair and group work is crucial for student success, with everyday activities including situational practice, debates, conversations, and small-group discussions (Caicedo, 2015).

### *2.2.4. Song and rhymes*

Younger students derive enjoyment and educational value from songs, rhymes, and chants, as repetition and simplicity in these methods enhance memorization (Dunn et al., 1983). Rhymes effectively convey the full range of English sounds, emphasizing pronunciation and

intonation, playing a crucial role in the language acquisition of early learners and aiding vocabulary retention and imitation. Empirical studies reveal that songs facilitate pronunciation learning (e.g., Conesa & Rubio, 2015). Songs and rhymes provide an interactive platform for pronunciation exercises, rhythm, and intonation, engaging learners, particularly younger ones (Reid, 2016). They contribute to children's psychomotor, emotional, social, and cognitive development, enhancing vocabulary expansion and speech rhythms (Paterson & Willis, 2008). Music aids in grasping patterns and structures, facilitating the expression of emotions and confidence in language use (Bokiev et al., 2018). Effective song selection is crucial, considering vocabulary and grammar, to prevent monotony while uplifting the learning environment (Lems, 1996; Millington, 2011).

#### *2.2.5. Tongue twisters*

Tongue twisters, also called challenging word groups, aid in improving accents (Carmen, 2010). They help distinguish between challenging phonemes, like /ʃ/ and /s/, as enjoyable exercises to reinforce English sounds (Bailey & Savage, 1994). These exercises provide repetition, emphasis, rhythm, and intonation, effectively teaching pronunciation. Scientific studies demonstrate their importance in enhancing motivation, classroom environment, and pronunciation skills (Mu'in et al., 2017). Tongue twisters benefit language learners by raising awareness of pronunciation issues, focusing on problem-solving, developing muscle memory, enhancing listening skills, and adding an entertaining rhythm to language learning, making memorization engaging (Juniarti, 2020).

#### *2.2.6. Using minimal pairs*

A minimal pair consists of words that differ in only one sound but have distinct meanings and pronunciations, aiding in distinguishing similar-sounding words in English (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). Recommended by linguists, minimal pair exercises are valuable tools for improving pronunciation skills, creating a contrastive environment that motivates students and enhances their awareness of distinct sounds (Luu, 2010). Marpaung et al. (2023) highlight two types of minimal pair teaching tools: word and phrase exercises. Word pairs involve comparing two terms that may sound similar (e.g., 'thing' and 'sing'), while syntagmatic and paradigmatic pairs focus on sentence structures. Paradigmatic pairs compare two words within and between sentences, aiding children in differentiating similar-sounding words. Teachers widely agree that minimal pairs significantly contribute to students' understanding of distinct sounds, establishing a phonemic contrast that is motivating and easy to discern words and helping students develop correct pronunciation habits and comprehend spoken language more accurately (Luu, 2010).

#### *2.2.7. Pronunciation software*

Various software tools, such as Connected Speech, Streaming Speech, Electronic Dictionaries, and Accent Master software, cater to teaching pronunciation. Streaming Speech focuses on British and American pronunciation for intermediate to advanced courses (Cauldwell, 2002). Electronic Dictionary Software enhances autonomy, allowing users to listen, record, and compare word pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000). Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Teacher (CAPT) software was effective in English pronunciation training (Gilakjani & Rahimy, 2019).

### **2.3. Difficulties in teaching pronunciation among EFL teachers**

#### *2.3.1. Time limitations and curriculum restrictions*

Empirical studies show that time limitations and curriculum restrictions contribute to challenges in pronunciation teaching. For instance, Couper (2021) surveyed non-native and

native-speaker instructors about pronunciation instruction across various settings. Two projects delved into teachers' cognitions, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 28 non-native teachers in Uruguay and surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations with 19 native respondents in New Zealand. Both groups faced phonetic and phonological knowledge challenges despite diverse linguistic backgrounds, with native teachers exhibiting a more significant gap. Constraints like limited time, curriculum, and textbooks lacking opportunities for pronunciation activities hindered pronunciation training. Non-native teachers teaching EFL in Uruguay, akin to English language teachers in Asian countries, avoided pronunciation teaching due to insecurity. Thus, collaborative efforts among organizations, text authors, and researchers are essential to integrate pronunciation teaching effectively into courses and establish a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for informing teachers.

### *2.3.2. Media-related challenges*

Utilizing media in pronunciation teaching presents challenges such as teachers' technological competence, content quality, device availability, and internet connectivity (Ertmer et al., 2015). Many instructors with access to technology may resist using it due to contentment with existing methods and a lack of technical skills or time for preparation (Capper, 2003). Additionally, media use in elementary schools can lead to student distraction and reduced concentration (Clark, 2016). Media effectiveness depends on content quality and requires teachers to possess the skills to analyze, produce, and evaluate media content (Ertmer et al., 2015). Overcoming these challenges demands careful preparation, investment in skills development, and resource allocation.

### *2.3.3. Impact of the first language*

Children acquire their first language, the mother tongue, from birth, forming the foundation of their sociolinguistic identity. The impact of a student's native language on English pronunciation poses significant challenges, particularly in primary school. This influence can lead to mispronunciations, especially with complex aspects like diphthongs. Young students may face difficulty due to underdeveloped oral organs. Research by Derwing (2005), Kho (2011), Islamiah (2012), Munro (1999), and Levis (2005) highlights the strong influence of the mother tongue and native language auditory patterns on English pronunciation. Native language sound patterns can be transferred, resulting in foreign accents and pronunciation challenges. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) point out three ways the original language's sound system affects pronunciation: the absence of sounds in the target language, differences in phonotactic constraints/rules, and carrying over rhythmic patterns. Hence, addressing the multifaceted impact of the native language on pronunciation is crucial for effective teaching strategies and helping elementary students achieve accurate and intelligible English pronunciation.

### *2.3.4. Students' lack of motivation to learn English*

Dörnyei (1998) emphasizes motivation as the driving force behind initiating the study of a second language. For elementary school children, the slower development of pronunciation skills and limited exposure to English can result in a loss of motivation (Flege, 1995). The lack of motivation among students poses a significant challenge in English pronunciation instruction. Motivation is crucial to language learning success, impacting academic goals and second language acquisition (Christiana, 2009; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). In regions with limited exposure to the language, demotivation in second language learning has gained attention (Muhonen, 2004). Elementary school children's slower reaction ability to learning English and pronunciation as a new skill can lead to reduced confidence and motivation (Flege, 1995).

### 2.3.5. *Other factors*

Pinter (2006) highlighted that pre-school or early school children approach language holistically. These learners absorb important messages but struggle with language evaluation. Ji (2021) found that age matters when teaching pronunciation, as late starters require more effort and motivation than early starters. They exhibit limited self-awareness, rudimentary reading and writing skills in their first language, a self-centric focus, limited knowledge about the world, and a preference for fantasy, imagination, and movement. Also, several studies in the Vietnamese context highlight the difficulties Vietnamese learners face in acquiring English pronunciation. Ha (2005) identified three typical pronunciation mistakes among Vietnamese learners of English (i.e., sound omission, sound confusion, and sound redundancy). Also, Luu (2011) studied the English consonants that are the most difficult for Vietnamese students. The results showed that students were likelier to replace Vietnamese sounds with English sounds while pronouncing the English fricatives /j/, /z/, and the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Similarly, Vu and Moore (2023) delved into persistent challenges in Vietnamese learners' English pronunciation. They found that English language instructors face challenges, including a lack of pedagogical expertise and resources for teaching pronunciation and an inadequate number of teacher preparation programs.

In summary, this extensive overview covers the multifaceted aspects of pronunciation, ranging from definitions to teaching practices, strategies for young learners, and challenges instructors face. Key points include the definition of pronunciation as the production of English sounds to create meaning, involving three components: intonation, stress, and sound. Pronunciation teaching practices involve methodologies to enhance correct pronunciation skills, with the teacher's role being crucial. The strategies for young learners emphasize the holistic approach to language education, integrating pronunciation into texts, and the importance of teachers possessing expertise and the ability to spark student interest. The role of communicative activities, songs, rhymes, tongue twisters, minimal pairs, and software in pronunciation instruction is highlighted, along with the effective use of visual and audio aids.

The literature review also provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by EFL teachers in teaching pronunciation, mainly focusing on curricular and time constraints. Couper's (2021) study highlights the difficulties encountered by native and non-native English teachers across various contexts, emphasizing issues such as time restrictions and inadequate curricular support hindering pronunciation instruction effectiveness. Additionally, Clark (2016) and Ertmer et al. (2015) address media-related issues in pronunciation teaching. Furthermore, research by Flege (1995), Kho (2011), Islamiah (2012), Levis (2005), Munro (1999), and others explores the impact of learners' first language on English pronunciation. Muhonen (2004) addresses demotivation in pronunciation learning. These studies contribute to understanding the complexity of pronunciation learning and the necessity for specialized teaching methods. In the Vietnamese context, research by Ha (2005), Luu (2011), and Vu and Moore (2023) provide valuable insights into specific pronunciation challenges faced by Vietnamese language learners. These studies shed light on linguistic and cultural factors influencing pronunciation learning.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. *Research design***

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach, which is well-suited for exploring social or human issues when existing literature is limited (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research allows direct engagement with participants, which is especially useful when studying topics with scant existing information (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In this study, in-depth interviews were the

primary method for investigating teaching methodologies and challenges in pronunciation instruction among primary school educators. This approach provided direct insights from teachers, offering a firsthand perspective on their experiences, techniques, and difficulties. By employing qualitative methods, the study aimed to comprehensively understand pronunciation instruction processes and identify specific challenges primary school teachers face.

### **3.2. Participants**

Three female Vietnamese elementary school teachers specializing in English instruction willingly participated in this research. These educators, aged between 30 and 50 years, currently teach in public schools in Ho Chi Minh City, each with more than one year of experience in English education. To maintain confidentiality, all personal details about the participants were protected, and pseudonyms were used to replace the interviewer's identity throughout the study. The educators' voluntary participation reflects their dedication to contributing to and actively engaging in the research process.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Teaching different types of learners</b>
ĐTS	Female	33	Binh Hung Hoa 2 Primary School	03	Elementary school students
NTBT	Female	42	Binh Hung Hoa 1 Primary School	08	Elementary school students
NTNT	Female	40	Binh Hung Hoa Primary School	10	Elementary and middle school students and adult learners

*Note.* Data analysis result of the research

### **3.3. Research instruments**

The study utilized interviews with three elementary school teachers. The researcher designed a set of 13 interview questions (see Appendix online) to investigate the strategies, methods, and challenges encountered by English teachers in elementary schools during pronunciation instruction. The researcher played various roles, including question designer, data collector, and analyst, ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive approach to data collection and analysis in alignment with the research objectives.

### **3.4. Data collection procedure**

For data collection, interviews were conducted with teachers from three different elementary schools between September 11th, 2023, and September 15th, 2023. The researcher recorded the interviews to ensure accurate documentation, and the sessions took place in quiet environments, such as teachers' offices and classrooms during their free periods, to minimize external disruptions. The researchers were committed to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, ensuring that no details revealing their identities would be disclosed. Thorough and accurate transcription of the interviews was carried out to uphold the integrity of the findings.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Data analysis for this qualitative research followed inductive content analysis. According to Vears and Gillam (2022), inductive content analysis is a form of qualitative analysis aimed at generating an interpretation of the meaning(s) within the content of the dataset. The data analysis involves the process of coding, which includes labeling text segments in each document or interview transcript and using these labels to identify and group similar text segments within and across documents or transcripts (Vears & Gillam, 2022). The coding process allows researchers to categorize information based on emerging themes, ideas, or concepts without the constraints of predefined categories. Through an iterative and flexible approach, researchers continuously analyzed, refined, and grouped coded segments, ultimately revealing patterns and themes that organically arise from the data.

## **4. Findings and discussion**

### **4.1. Findings**

In elementary classrooms, pronunciation teaching has shifted towards a multisensory and interactive approach, departing from conventional methods. This innovative blend includes visual aids, games, auditory stimuli, and technology to create an engaging learning environment. Recognizing the importance of appealing to multiple senses, educators integrate visual aids, interactive questioning, technology, and games to offer a holistic pronunciation experience for young learners. However, educators collectively acknowledge the challenges shaping their instructional landscape. The first prevalent theme revolves around navigating students' ongoing development of language and sound production abilities. Educators recognize the dynamic nature of this development, necessitating qualities of patience and creativity. The need for adaptable and supportive instructional approaches becomes evident as educators grapple with the evolving linguistic capabilities of their young charges. In the following sections, the researchers elaborated on these findings, presenting a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences in teaching strategies and examining each participant's challenges.

*4.1.1. English pronunciation teaching strategies that Vietnamese primary school teachers of English use*

#### *4.1.1.1. Multisensory and interactive approaches to pronunciation instruction*

The teaching methods for pronunciation employed in elementary school classrooms exhibit a common thread emphasizing interactive and multimedia approaches. The three participants used visual aids, such as images related to curriculum vocabularies, like fruits or toys, which play a pivotal role in engaging students visually and facilitating language learning. The three interviewed educators also emphasized the effectiveness of methods involving images, games, sound simulations, and videos, pointing to their suitability for elementary school students. This approach recognizes the importance of engaging multiple senses in learning, making it enjoyable and effective for young learners. Integrating visual aids, interactive games, and auditory stimuli contributes to elementary students' holistic and memorable learning experiences.

*Methods involving images, videos, and games are usually suitable for elementary school students because they make learning enjoyable and effective. (NTBT)*

*I find that methods involving images, games, and sound simulations are often the most suitable for elementary school students. They make learning enjoyable and help students remember sounds and vocabulary more effectively. (NTNT)*

Besides, Mr. ĐTS used the strategy of interactive questioning, which adds another layer, encouraging students to actively participate by identifying objects presented by their peers in English. Additionally, technology integration emerges as a shared theme, with teachers incorporating English instructional videos and sound simulations to enhance the learning experience. The multifaceted use of educational technology captures students' attention and reinforces pronunciation through auditory and visual cues. According to Ms. NTBT and Ms. NTNT, incorporating games or activities at the end of classes is a consistent practice and solidifies playfully learned concepts.

*Another method is using pictures related to vocabulary from their curriculum, such as fruits or toys. I show an image to the first student and ask, "What's this?" For example, if it's a picture of a pencil, the student responds, "It's a pencil." Then, the first student showed another image to the second student and asked the same question. Towards the end of the class, I often play English videos for children and organize educational games. (ĐTS)*

*Typically, I also play English instructional videos, and at the end of the class, I organize some games or activities to reinforce what they've learned. (NTBT)*

*To teach pronunciation to elementary school students, I often use methods such as using images, games, and sound simulations. I try to create an engaging and positive learning environment where young learners can combine learning with entertainment. (NTNT)*

Overall, the prevailing themes underscore a dynamic and interactive teaching environment, where educators seamlessly blend visual aids, interactive questioning, technology, and games to create a positive and engaging atmosphere for elementary school students learning pronunciation.

#### *4.1.1.2. Repetition and guided pronunciation practice*

Mr. ĐTS mentioned the drilling method, which involves repetitive practice where the teacher speaks, and students repeat, focusing on variations in tone and volume. At the same time, Ms. NTBT emphasized guided pronunciation through a structured process, starting with listening to native speakers, followed by step-by-step guidance on tongue placement. The practice then progresses from collective repetition to individual pronunciation. Repeated practice and guided instruction were highlighted as honing pronunciation skills, ensuring students' gradual and structured development.

*Typically, I use the drilling method, which means I speak, and then the students repeat after me. I also have them repeat sentences with different tones, like speaking loudly, whispering, or mumbling. (ĐTS)*

*First, I have the students listen to a native speaker's pronunciation. Then, I read and guide them on how to place their tongue correctly to pronounce the word. After that, I ask the students to repeat in unison, then in groups, and finally, individually. (NTBT)*

#### *4.1.1.3. Promoting inclusive pronunciation instruction*

The teaching methods shared by educators highlight a commitment to catering to the diverse learning needs of students through differentiated instruction. In these approaches, the three educators adapted their strategies based on the pace of individual learners. Slower learners receive additional time, support, and patience to grasp pronunciation concepts, ensuring they progress at their own pace. Conversely, faster learners face challenges, rewards, and complex exercises to maintain engagement and stimulate continued advancement. The

emphasis on differentiation underscores the importance of tailoring teaching approaches to accommodate students' varied learning speeds and capabilities, promoting an inclusive and effective learning environment.

*For slower learners, I provide extra time and support, while for faster learners, I offer more challenges and complex exercises.* (NTBT)

*I give them rewards for faster learners, while for slower learners, I let them practice until they can say it clearly.* (ĐTS)

*I show more patience and allow more practice time for slower learners until they progress. As for faster learners, I offer more challenging pronunciation exercises based on their abilities.* (NTNT)

The educators employed a differentiated approach to pronunciation instruction, tailoring their methods based on the complexity of words. For challenging words, strategies involve detailed descriptions of pronunciation, emphasizing the positioning of lips, teeth, and tongue. Using native audio and breaking difficult words into smaller components aids clarity and comprehension. In contrast, a more straightforward approach is taken for easier words, with students first listening to native speaker pronunciation and then repeating. This differentiated strategy acknowledges the varying difficulty levels of words and ensures that students receive appropriate guidance and support based on the complexity of the vocabulary.

*For difficult words, I spend more time describing how to pronounce them, like the position of lips, teeth, and tongue. For easy words, I have the students listen to a native speaker's pronunciation first, and then they repeat. Usually, they can speak easy words fluently.* (ĐTS)

*I show the new word 02 - 03 times for difficult words and use native audio. Then, I pronounce the vowel first, followed by the consonant, and have the whole class repeat. Then, we blend the vowel and consonant to form the complete word.* (NTBT)

*I use images and sound simulations for complex words, and I may break the word into smaller parts to help students distinguish and pronounce each part.* (NTNT)

To summarise, the participants touched on various aspects of teaching English pronunciation to elementary school students, focusing on multisensory and interactive approaches, repetition and guided practice, and a differentiated instructional approach. The common themes that emerge from the educators' strategies include a strong emphasis on interactive and multimedia approaches, using visual aids, interactive questioning, technology integration, and games to create a positive and engaging learning environment for young learners. The drilling method and guided pronunciation practice highlight the significance of repetitive practice and structured guidance in gradually developing pronunciation skills. Additionally, the educators showcased a commitment to differentiated instruction, adapting teaching methods to cater to the diverse learning needs of students, whether they are slower or faster learners. The research highlights the importance of tailoring teaching approaches, incorporating multimedia elements, and providing differentiated support to create effective and inclusive English language learning experiences for elementary school students.

#### *4.1.2. Challenges in teaching pronunciation to primary school students*

##### *4.1.2.1. Development of language and sound production abilities*

Participants acknowledged the challenges associated with teaching English pronunciation to elementary school students. Ms. NTBT emphasized the difficulty posed by the student's

ongoing language development and different sound production abilities. In response to these challenges, patience and creativity are deemed essential qualities for effective teaching, suggesting a need for adaptable and supportive instructional approaches.

*Yes, it can be challenging because students in elementary school are still developing their language and sound production abilities. Being patient and creative in teaching is essential to help them improve their pronunciation. (NTBT)*

Furthermore, Ms. NTBT also identified issues related to the physical aspects of pronunciation, noting that students may struggle to reproduce sounds accurately and control the necessary mouth muscles for correct word pronunciation. Another significant challenge mentioned by Ms. NTBT is the difficulty in correcting pronunciation for young learners due to their age-related limitations in sound repetitions.

*Students may struggle with accurately reproducing sounds and controlling their mouth muscles to pronounce words correctly. (NTBT)*

*One of the significant challenges for young learners is correcting pronunciation. Because of their young age, they tend to have less accurate sound repetitions. Adjusting their English pronunciation can be somewhat challenging for me. (NTNT)*

#### 4.1.2.2. Learners' motivation

The second common theme addresses the issue of student motivation, recognizing that some students may lack the enthusiasm to engage in language learning. Despite introducing innovative teaching methods, educators acknowledged the persistent challenge of motivating all students, highlighting the importance of addressing motivational barriers to ensure successful language instruction. Participants also discussed student motivation and energy issues, with some students exhibiting a lack of enthusiasm for learning despite encouragement. This challenge highlights the importance of maintaining engagement and finding effective student motivation strategies.

*Yes, there are challenges. For example, some students lack motivation or energy for learning, no matter how much I encourage them. But I can't ignore them. (ĐTS)*

*Yes, it can be challenging, especially when some students lack the motivation to study. Despite introducing new and engaging teaching methods, there may still be students who are reluctant to learn. (NTNT)*

In conclusion, the participants in the study acknowledged and highlighted the challenges associated with teaching English pronunciation to elementary school students. The recurring theme centers on the difficulties arising from the ongoing development of language and sound production abilities in young learners. This emphasizes the necessity for educators to possess patience and creativity in their teaching methods, adapting to the evolving needs of their students. The second prevalent theme addresses the issue of student motivation, recognizing that despite the introduction of innovative teaching methods, some students may lack the enthusiasm required for effective language learning. The participants stressed the persistent challenge of motivating all students, emphasizing the need to overcome motivational barriers for successful language instruction. This multifaceted understanding of challenges underscores the complexity of teaching pronunciation to elementary school students. It also highlights the importance of tailored, adaptable, and supportive instructional approaches to address these issues.

## 4.2. Discussion

The study significantly contributes to the literature by providing insights into effective English pronunciation teaching practices and challenges encountered by educators. By highlighting the importance of multisensory approaches, structured practice, differentiated instruction, and understanding learner challenges, the study offers valuable guidance for educators seeking to enhance pronunciation instruction in elementary classrooms.

The study underscores that most teachers exhibit an optimistic attitude toward imparting pronunciation skills to elementary students, employing a multifaceted strategy that combines traditional and technological elements to cater to the specific needs of young learners. Visual aids are crucial in this process, allowing teachers to deliver clear demonstrations, enhance comprehension, and create an enjoyable and memorable learning experience (Tran et al., 2021). The preference of young learners for videos over traditional classroom settings is supported by Allah's (2023) research, which enhances students' pronunciation through exposure to facial expressions, native speakers' voices, and subtitles.

Besides, the current study on English pronunciation teaching strategies among Vietnamese primary teachers shares several commonalities with previous research, enhancing our understanding of practical pedagogical approaches. The study results are similar to those of Hemei (1997) concerning audiovisual aids. Hemei (1997) reinforces the positive reception of audiovisual aids, showcasing teachers' adaptability to contemporary teaching methods through audio and video in lectures. Like Tran et al.'s (2021) findings, the current study underscores the efficacy of multisensory and interactive processes, emphasizing visual aids, interactive questioning, and technology integration for a dynamic learning environment. This aligns with the broader literature advocating for the benefits of engaging multiple senses in the language learning process (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

Furthermore, the acknowledgment of the significance of repetition and guided pronunciation practice in the current study resonates with the emphasis on repetitive practice found in the work of Astina (2020), Avery and Ehrlich (1992), and Marpaung et al. (2023). Astina's (2020) research underlines the effectiveness of the drilling method in simplifying phonetic concepts for elementary school children, emphasizing that repetitive drills contribute to better comprehension. Astina (2020) also found that despite limited resources, teachers employ audiovisual aids with relevant pictures and even use phones for content presentation to capture students' interest and foster concentration.

The integration of technology tools in the current study, such as Connected Speech, Streaming Speech, and Electronic Dictionaries, mirrors the findings of Gilakjani and Rahimy (2019), highlighting the positive impact of Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Teacher on English pronunciation training. This emphasis on technology aligns with the broader trend in the literature recognizing the potential of multimedia tools for enhancing pronunciation skills (Levis, 2005). Participants' differentiation approach to pronunciation instruction to cater to the diverse learning needs of students in the current study also aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of tailoring instructional methods based on individual learner profiles (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2009).

Besides, the study acknowledges challenges English teachers face, particularly waning motivation among young learners. This finding aligns with Flege's (1995) assertion that elementary school children develop pronunciation skills slower than adults, potentially leading to a loss of enthusiasm for learning. Flege (1995) also stated the importance of addressing these challenges through practical strategies to maintain motivation and facilitate gradual improvement in pronunciation skills. The recognition of motivation as a persistent challenge in the current

research resonates with the broader literature on the impact of motivation on language learning success (Dörnyei, 1998). Also, challenges related to the ongoing development of language and sound production abilities among elementary school students align with the acknowledgment of age-related limitations in sound repetitions from previous studies (Ji, 2021).

### **5. Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations for future studies**

The findings provide valuable insights into the English pronunciation teaching strategies of elementary school English teachers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and their challenges. The predominant teaching strategies involve multisensory and interactive approaches, incorporating visual aids, interactive questioning, technology integration, and games to create an engaging learning environment. The drilling method and guided pronunciation practice emphasize repetitive practice and structured guidance. Teachers also adopt a differentiated approach, tailoring instruction based on individual learning needs and pacing. Challenges identified include the ongoing development of students' language and sound production abilities, necessitating patience and creativity. Motivating students, particularly those lacking enthusiasm, poses a persistent challenge. The study underscores the importance of adaptable and supportive instructional approaches to address these challenges effectively, ensuring an inclusive and engaging English language learning experience for elementary school students.

This research is invaluable for English teachers working with young learners, offering diverse teaching techniques tailored to children with varying learning preferences. It significantly contributes to teachers' strategies for teaching English pronunciation to elementary school students, enriching their approaches and raising awareness. The study provides a valuable resource, equipping educators with diverse teaching techniques to enhance language learning and retention in young learners. By incorporating the strategies and experiences of their peers, educators can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of their students. Furthermore, the research sheds light on English pronunciation teachers' challenges, paving the way for innovative solutions and strategies to navigate obstacles more effectively.

Despite yielding valuable insights and practical results, this research has limitations. The small number of participants, comprising only three teachers from public elementary schools, may not fully represent the diversity of teaching strategies and challenges all English teachers face. Thus, future research endeavors should address the limitations of this study by expanding the participant pool to gain a more comprehensive understanding of English pronunciation teaching strategies. The study's focus on public school educators may not encompass the full spectrum of teaching strategies and difficulties encountered in the private school sector, which often has different resources, curricular approaches, and student demographics. Hence, future studies should explore experiences and challenges faced by a more diverse range of educators and encompass a broader spectrum of educational settings, including public and private schools. While interviews provide valuable insights into teachers' views on their teaching methods, they may not accurately reflect what happens in the classroom. Teachers' responses are based on their understanding and self-reflection, which may not be entirely consistent with their behavior. Therefore, future studies should use additional methods, such as classroom observations or analysis of instructional materials, to enhance the reliability of the findings. These methods provide additional data to validate the information gathered from the interviews and contribute to the evolution of education, ensuring that educators and learners benefit from the latest innovations and best practices in the field.

### **NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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