ENHANCING STANDARD PRONUNCIATION SKILLS AMONG PRIMARY EDUCATION MAJORS AT UNIVERSITY OF KHANH HOA

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TÓM TẮT: Việc giảng dạy môn Tiếng Việt ở tiểu học rất quan trọng đối với việc hình thành năng lực ngôn ngữ, chữ viết của học sinh. Với mỗi sinh viên sư phạm, phát âm chuẩn là điều kiện bắt buộc trước khi các em đứng lớp. Bài viết của chúng tôi trình bày một số vấn đề cần quan tâm trong việc phát triển năng lực phát âm cho sinh viên ngành Giáo dục tiểu học; đặc biệt chú trọng những lỗi phát âm mà sinh viên sư phạm ở tỉnh Khánh Hòa hay mắc phải do ảnh hưởng của phương ngữ. Từ đó, chúng tôi đề xuất một số biện pháp giúp sinh viên rèn luyện phát âm chuẩn nhằm đáp ứng chuẩn đầu ra về năng lực ngôn ngữ cho các giáo viên tiểu học tương lai.

ABSTRACT: The teaching of Vietnamese at the primary school level holds significant importance in shaping students' language competence and literacy. For students majoring in Primary Education, the ability to pronounce words accurately is a fundamental requirement before they take on teaching roles in the classroom. However, many pre-service teachers, particularly those in Khanh Hoa Province, often exhibit pronunciation errors influenced by regional dialects. This poses challenges not only to their own language development but also to the effectiveness of their future teaching. This study aims to examine key issues related to the development of pronunciation skills among Primary Education students. Special attention is given to identifying common pronunciation mistakes and understanding their causes. Based on these findings, the study proposes practical solutions to help students improve their pronunciation, thereby ensuring they meet the language proficiency standards required for future primary school teachers.

1. Introduction

Students majoring in Primary Education are trained to undertake teaching responsibilities at both public and private elementary schools—an educational level that serves as the foundational stage in a child's academic journey. In the Vietnamese language curriculum at the primary level, instruction emphasizes the development of four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, oral language skills, particularly speaking and pronunciation, are directly influenced by the teacher, who serves as both a model and facilitator of language acquisition. Because primary school students are at the initial stage of learning to use Vietnamese in a formal, standardized, and academic manner, teachers are expected to demonstrate exemplary language use.

Accordingly, accurate pronunciation is a fundamental requirement for Vietnamese language teachers at the primary level. Their pronunciation must be grounded in solid linguistic knowledge and conform to normative language standards, as it becomes

the model for students to imitate. However, in practice, many Primary Education students still exhibit non-standard pronunciation and, in some cases, lack awareness of the importance of standard speech in their future teaching roles.

In Khanh Hoa Province, the local dialect belongs to the Southern Vietnamese dialect group, which carries distinct phonetic characteristics. Moreover, local vernaculars in some districts differ even more markedly from other dialect regions. These dialectal features pose challenges for students in Primary Education programs, who must overcome local speech habits to meet the language proficiency standards required for teaching Vietnamese effectively.

This study is based on an analysis of audio recordings and pronunciation assessments of 65 Primary Education students from Khanh Hoa. It identifies common pronunciation issues observed during oral communication and examines the extent to which local dialectal features influence students' speech. From these findings, the study proposes targeted pedagogical strategies to help students improve their pronunciation, contributing to the overall enhancement of language competence for future primary school teachers.

2. Content

Students enrolled in teacher training programs in general, and those majoring in Primary Education in particular, are required to possess standard pronunciation competence. Pronunciation competence, or phonetic competence, refers to the knowledge of phonetics and the ability to apply phonological units effectively in communication. Standard pronunciation encompasses accurate articulation of initial consonants, vowels, rhyme components, and tones. This is a compulsory requirement for

teachers when teaching and communicating within the school environment.

To support the objectives of this study, we collected data in the form of student voice recordings from classroom activities, as well as individual and group video assignments that feature students' speech or reading performances. We conducted a survey to identify common pronunciation errors made by students. In the teaching process, we also examined and assessed students' understanding and knowledge of phonological units.

2.1. Dialectal Characteristics of the Vietnamese Spoken in Khanh Hoa

A dialect is a regional variety of a language spoken by the general population in a specific locality, characterized by distinctive features in comparison to the standard language or to other dialects.

There are multiple perspectives on the classification of Vietnamese dialects due to differing criteria among scholars. One widely accepted classification divides Vietnamese into three major dialectal regions based on tone systems, initial consonants, and rhymes in syllable structure: the Northern dialect (spoken in the North), the Central dialect (from Thanh Hoa to Thua Thien–Hue), and the Southern dialect (from Da Nang southwards). This tripartite division is supported by numerous linguists, including Hoàng Thị Châu (2004), Vương Hữu Lễ (1974), and Võ Xuân Trang (1997), among others.

For the purposes of this study, we adopt the three-region classification. Accordingly, the dialect spoken in Khanh Hoa belongs to the Southern dialect group.

The Southern dialect is characterized by several phonetic features, including:

Tone System: The Southern dialect has five tones. The hỏi (falling-rising) and ngã

(creaky-rising) tones are merged, with pronunciation tending toward the hỏi tone.

Initial Consonants: A major distinction in the initial consonant system of the Southern dialect, compared to other dialects, lies in the transformation of palatalized consonants /bj/, /dj/, /zj/. In the Northern dialect, the palatalization is lost, producing fricatives such as /v/ and /z/. However, in the Southern dialect, the palatalized element dominates, transforming the consonants into the initial glide /j/ in all three cases (Hoàng Thị Châu, 2004, p.147). Researchers have concluded that the glide /j/ frequently appears as an initial consonant in Southern dialects, replacing the /v/ (v) and /z/ (d, gi) sounds found in other dialects.

Additionally, the glide /w/ may also occur in initial position in the Southern dialect. This results from the influence of the medial glide /-ṷ-/ on velar and glottal consonants, particularly when preceded by /k/, /χ/, or /h/. Thus, both glides /j/ and /w/ serve as notable features distinguishing the Southern dialect from others.

Other initial consonants in the Southern dialect reflect a transitional stage between the Central and Northern dialects. In the South Central region, retroflex consonants such as /ʈ/ (tr) and /ʂ/ (s) are pronounced similarly to the Central dialects. However, in the Southernmost areas, most speakers do not distinguish /ʈ/ (tr) from /c/ (ch), or /ʂ/ (s) from /s/ (x), as seen in the Northern dialect. The consonant /z/ persists with many variants, ranging from the retroflex approximant /ʐ/ to the fricative /z/, as in *rổ rá* or *zổ zá*. In the far southern regions, this may even be realized as /ɣ/, producing *gổ gá*. Consonants /χ/ and /f/ are true fricatives in the South Central region, while in rural Southern areas, aspirated stops /f/ and /χ/ are more commonly encountered (Hoàng Thị Châu, 2004, p.150).

Rhymes (Rime): Interactions between vowels and final consonants result in significant changes to both components, leading to substantial modifications in both the quantity and quality of rhymes in the Southern dialect—making the system notably complex (Hoàng Thị Châu, 2004, p.180).

Southern dialects exhibit a reduced number of rhymes compared to Northern and Central dialects.

The final consonant clusters /-ŋ, -k/ do not appear after front vowels in the Southern dialect. Instead, they are replaced by /-n/ and /-t/, e.g., *mình → mừn, chênh vênh → chân vân, ếch → ất, thinh thích → thưn thứt*.

The original pair /-n, -t/ remains only in a limited set of rhymes such as *in-it* and *ên-êt*. For instance, the phrase *trên hết* is pronounced unchanged in the South Central region, but in the Southern region, it becomes *trơn hớt*. In most other vowel contexts, /-n, -t/ are replaced by /-ŋ, -k/: e.g., *khen khét → kheng khéc, chan chát → chang chác*.

The final consonants /-m, -p/ themselves do not change. However, they influence the vowels preceding them by reducing lip rounding in back vowels, e.g., *um tùm, lúp xúp* become *ưm từm, lứp xứp*. Additionally, the words *họp, hộp*, and *hợp* become homophones in this dialect, all pronounced as *họp*.

2.2. Common Pronunciation Errors among Primary Education Students in Khanh Hoa

Based on the primary phonetic features of the Southern Vietnamese dialect and the results of a pronunciation survey conducted with students from Khanh Hoa majoring in Primary Education, we have identified and summarized several typical local pronunciation patterns observed in the region as follows:

Errors in Initial Consonants

Confusion between the consonants /v/ and /z/: e.g., *vá* (net) → *dá*. This phenomenon is quite prevalent across many areas in Khanh Hoa and is a distinctive feature of the Southern dialect.

Confusion between the initial consonant /v/ and the complex onset /k-ṵ-/: e.g., *vét* → *quét*, *ví* → *quý*, etc.

Transformation of /χ/ into /f/ when combined with a medial glide: e.g., *khoai lang* → *phai lang*, *khuya* → *phia*, *khoan khoái* → *phang phái*, etc.

Substitution of /h-ṵ-/ with /k-ṵ-/: e.g., *hóa* → *quá*, *hoài* → *quài*, *hoàng* → *quàng*, etc.

Replacement of the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ with the voiced counterpart /b/: e.g., *đèn pin* → *đèn bin*, *Sa Pa* → *Sa Ba*, etc.

Errors in Rhymes (Vowel Nucleus and Final Consonants)

Confusions in Vowel Nucleus:

Substitution of the diphthong /ɯɤ̯/ with the monophthong /ɯ/: e.g., *mười* → *mừ*, *dưới* → *dứ*, *lưới* → *lứ*. This is widespread throughout districts and towns in Khanh Hoa and represents a prominent phonetic feature of the Southern dialect.

Confusion between /a/ and /ɛ/: e.g., *nước đá* → *nước đé*, commonly observed in Diên Khánh, Nha Trang, Ninh Hoa, and Van Ninh.

Confusion between /e/ and the diphthong /ie̯/: e.g., *làm thêm* → *làm thiêm*, *đêm* → *điêm*

- a frequent pattern appearing with high frequency in collected data.

Substitution of /e/ with /ɤ/ in open syllables: e.g., *làm thuê* → *làm thơ*, *có thể* → *có thở*, etc.

Substitution of the rhyme *ôi* with *âu*: commonly found in Ninh Hoa town and Van Ninh district. In Cam Ranh (e.g., Da Bac area), where many residents are descendants of migrants from Phu Yen, similar deviations occur: e.g., *tối* → *tấu*, *cái chổi* → *cái chẩu*.

Other vowel shifts include /ɤ/ → /ɯ/ (e.g., *cơm* → *kưm*), and /o/ → /ɔ/ (e.g., *tối* → *tói*).

Confusions in Final Consonants:

Students from Khanh Hoa frequently confuse final consonants /-n/ and /-ŋ/, as well as /-k/ and /-t/. This pattern is also common among Southern dialect speakers.

Tone Errors

Most students from Khanh Hoa are unable to distinguish between the hỏi (falling-rising) and ngã (creaky-rising) tones, in accordance with the five-tone system characteristic of the Southern dialect.

Examples include:

giữ gìn → *giử gìn*

Vạn Giã → *Dạng Giả*

kỹ càng → *kỷ càng*

đã làm → *đả làm*

Bãi Trũ → *Bãi Trủ*

We have summarized several common pronunciation errors among students from Khanh Hoa in the following table.

Table. The percentage of pronunciation errors observed among students majoring in Primary Education at University of Khanh Hoa

Type of Pronunciation Error	Phenomenon	Regional Note	Number of students with errors	Percentage %
Initial Consonant Errors	Confusion between /v/ and /z/	Common across regions in Khanh Hoa; characteristic of Southern dialects	43/65	66,2

	Confusion between /v/ and /k-ụ-/	–	5/65	7,7
	/χ/ becomes /f/ with a glide	–	28/65	43.1
	/p/ becomes /b/	–	47/65	72,3
	/ɯɤ/ becomes /ɯ/	Widespread across districts in Khanh Hoa; Southern dialect feature	42/65	64,6
Rhyme/Vowel Errors	Confusion between /a/ and /ɛ/	Dien Khanh, Nha Trang, Ninh Hoa, Van Ninh	17/65	26,2
	Confusion between /e/ and /ie/	Common in various areas of Khanh Hoa	22/65	33,8
	/e/ becomes /ɤ/ in open syllables	–	16/65	24,6
	/ôi/ becomes /âu/	Ninh Hoa, Van Ninh, Da Bac (Cam Ranh, Phu Yen migrants)	7/65	10,8
	/ɤ/ becomes /ɯ/	–	15/65	23,1
	/o/ becomes /ɔ/	–	4/65	6,2
Final Consonant Errors	Confusion between /-n/ and /-ŋ/, /-k/ and /-t/	Common among speakers from Khanh Hoa; Southern dialect feature	62/65	95,4
Tone Errors	Inability to distinguish between *ngã* and *hỏi* tones	Reflects five-tone system typical of Southern dialects	60/65	92,3

Pronunciation errors among students majoring in Primary Education - particularly those involving confusion of initial consonants, vowels, final consonants, and tones can have significant negative impacts on their future teaching of Vietnamese at the primary level.

Firstly, inaccurate pronunciation by teachers may distort the standard pronunciation model presented to young learners. As primary school teachers play a crucial role in shaping students linguistic skills during their formative years, mispronunciations (e.g., tối pronounced as tấu, đèn pin as đèn bin) are likely to be imitated by students, potentially leading to long-term, ingrained errors that are difficult to correct.

Secondly, improper pronunciation compromises the teaching of spelling and writing skills. Many pronunciation errors are directly linked to difficulties in distinguishing between phonemes and corresponding graphemes. For instance, the inability to differentiate between /v/ and /qu/, or /n/ and /ng/, may result in students writing

words incorrectly (e.g., vét/quét, ăn/ăng), thereby adversely affecting their performance in Vietnamese language learning.

Moreover, mispronunciation hinders the comprehensive development of language skills. Pronunciation is foundational to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A teacher lacking standard pronunciation may face challenges in guiding students to read expressively, comprehend texts accurately, or articulate their thoughts effectively in spoken language.

Finally, primary school teachers serve as linguistic role models for both students and parents. Frequent pronunciation errors may undermine their professional credibility, diminish parental trust, and negatively influence the overall quality of classroom instruction.

2.3. Pronunciation Training Strategies for Pre-service Primary Education Students

It is inevitable that some pre-service teachers in Khanh Hoa commit pronunciation errors due to the considerable influence of regional dialects and vernacular speech. Correcting these errors and developing standard pronunciation in such students is by no means an easy task; however, it is not insurmountable. With adequate instructional approaches and student commitment, it is entirely feasible to support students in achieving the pronunciation standards required by the national professional teacher competency framework. This effort demands both the instructor's guidance and the learner's awareness and willingness to improve. The following strategies are proposed to help students achieve accurate pronunciation:

2.3.1. Mastering the Phonetic Features of Sounds

Learners must understand the specific phonetic features of sounds they frequently mispronounce. Instructors should equip students with knowledge of Vietnamese consonants and vowels, encouraging them to shift away from habitual dialectal pronunciation and focus on the correct articulatory mechanisms.

Students should be guided to listen carefully to the speech of others, observe standard pronunciation, and record their own speech to identify dialect-induced pronunciation errors. By referencing their phonetic knowledge, learners can self-correct and gradually enhance both their pronunciation skills and overall language competence.

2.3.2. Strategies for Correcting Initial Consonant Errors

Pronunciation errors involving initial consonants typically stem from the inability to distinguish between consonants that share similar articulatory characteristics. For instance, sounds such as /v/ and /z/ are often replaced by /j/—a voiced palatal fricative not included in the phonemic inventory of Vietnamese but similar in articulation to /v/ and /z/.

In Khanh Hoa, the initial /v/ is often pronounced as /j/. To correct this, learners may be trained using an intermediate sound such as /f/, which shares the same manner of articulation as /v/. Importantly, Southern Vietnamese speakers, including those in Khanh Hoa, are generally able to pronounce /f/ accurately. By first articulating the voiceless /f/ and then increasing the breath pressure while maintaining articulatory placement, students can transition to the voiced /v/. They are advised to place a hand on the larynx to feel the voicing difference.

Furthermore, students need to understand the phonetic contrasts between target sounds. For example, students in Khanh Hoa may substitute /ʈ/ (retroflex) with /c/ (palatal), as both are voiceless stops. However, they differ

in place of articulation: /ʈ/ is apical retroflex, whereas /c/ is dorsopalatal. Correct pronunciation requires learners to adjust tongue posture accordingly.

Similarly, when students pronounce /p/ as /b/ (e.g., *đèn pin → đèn bin*), the issue arises from both being bilabial stops differing only in voicing. Learners can practice distinguishing these by placing one hand near their mouth to detect airflow and the other on their larynx to sense vocal fold vibration. When producing /b/, they should feel vocal fold vibration with little air escape. For /p/, a strong burst of air should be perceptible without voicing.

Once individual sounds are accurately produced, students must integrate them into real communicative contexts—at the word, phrase, and sentence levels. This is essential because:

In actual communication, the smallest meaningful unit is not the phoneme or syllable, but the sentence.

Learners who correctly produce a sound in isolation may revert to dialectal patterns when speaking naturally, or overcompensate and mispronounce surrounding words or intonation.

Therefore, sound correction is considered successful only when learners can accurately produce the sound in a variety of linguistic contexts, including full texts.

The sequence of pronunciation training should progress from simple to complex:

Step 1: Isolated articulation of commonly confused phonemes (/v/ vs. /j/, /ʈ/ vs. /c/, /b/ vs. /p/).

Step 2: Practice with words containing these sounds.

Step 3: Practice with reading texts (prose or poetry) rich in target sounds.

Sustained progress in pronunciation requires perseverance and a continuous effort to monitor and adjust tongue and articulatory movements appropriately.

2.3.3. Strategies for Correcting Rhyme (Rime) Errors

Rhyme-related pronunciation errors often result from dialectal variations in rime structures. For example:

Diphthongs may be simplified: *muối → múi, uống rượu → úng rựu.*

Final consonants may be confused: /-t/ vs. /-k/, /-n/ vs. /-ŋ/, as in *chất lượng → chấc lượng, mát mẻ → mác mẻ, luôn luôn → luông luông.*

To address these issues, students must first analyze the standard orthography of the words:

muối = m + uô + i + acute accent

rượu = r + ươ + u + dot below

Compare with: *múi* = m + u + i + acute; *rựu* = r + ư + u + dot below

By conducting phonemic and orthographic analyses, students can identify the structural differences and become more aware of the specific phonetic features that require attention. For example, in articulating *uôi*, the mouth must open wider than when pronouncing *ui*.

2.3.4. Strategies for Correcting Tone Errors

Students from Central and Southern dialect regions frequently exhibit tone-related pronunciation errors. In the Central region, the ngã tone is often merged with either the hỏi or nặng tone. In the South, speakers commonly merge hỏi and ngã into a single "tone 7"—a hybrid tone characterized by a gradual fall followed by a sharp rise, reflecting elements of both the hỏi and ngã tones.

To correct tone errors, learners must be trained to produce the ngã tone (tone 3), which features a mid-high pitch with a broken contour due to glottal constriction. A corrective approach involves synthesizing tone 3 from existing tones:

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Begin with tone 2 (huyền, falling) to establish the base pitch,

Add elements of tone 6 (nặng, glottalized) to simulate the glottal stop,

Then rise sharply with tone 5 (sắc, rising) to complete the pitch contour.

This can be taught through syllable modeling, e.g., MA$_{265}$ → MA$\searrow\nearrow$ (with 2–6 longer than 6–5). Practicing this combined tonal pattern helps students reproduce the correct ngã tone. Repetition and incremental speed—while maintaining the relative pitch contours—will eventually lead to accurate tone acquisition.

2.4. Recommendations for the teacher education program at University of Khanh Hoa

In addition to the efforts of lecturers in implementing pronunciation training strategies, we propose several recommendations to enhance the teacher education program at Khanh Hoa University as follows:

First, it is essential to strengthen the content related to standard Vietnamese pronunciation within the curriculum. This includes introducing or enhancing courses in Vietnamese phonetics, with a focus on identifying and correcting regionally common pronunciation errors. Specialized modules, workshops, or short-term training courses on standard pronunciation should be designed, particularly for final-year students preparing for internships or graduation.

Second, regular and systematic assessment of pronunciation proficiency should be conducted. A standardized pronunciation assessment toolkit should be developed for students majoring in Primary Education. Evaluation criteria should encompass initial consonants, main vowels, final consonants, and tones. Assessment results should inform personalized learning plans, enabling

students to address and improve their pronunciation skills prior to graduation.

Third, pronunciation training should be integrated into teaching practicum sessions. During micro-teaching and school-based internships, students should receive feedback not only on pedagogical methods but also on pronunciation accuracy and word usage. Supervising lecturers and mentor teachers should be encouraged to provide explicit and constructive feedback on students' pronunciation to facilitate correction and improvement.

Finally, the role of lecturers responsible for Phonetics, Vietnamese Language, and Teaching Methods for Vietnamese in Primary Education should be further emphasized. These faculty members should collaborate closely with academic departments to develop a training program aligned with local linguistic realities and professional standards for primary school teachers.

3. Conclusion

Developing accurate pronunciation skills in the presence of long-standing regional dialectal influences remains a necessary yet challenging task for pre-service teacher education students in local contexts. To meet the output standards required for the teaching profession—especially for those teaching at the primary level—learners must possess a solid foundation in phonetics and phonology. Furthermore, they need to cultivate persistence and maintain a consistent awareness of their own articulation in both instructional and communicative settings.

Primary Education majors will, in the near future, serve as the first formal guides for young learners in mastering the Vietnamese language. As such, the accuracy of their own pronunciation is of critical importance—not only as a model for imitation but also as a means of ensuring linguistic competence in

their pupils. Addressing dialectal interference and fostering standard pronunciation should therefore be central objectives in teacher training programs, particularly for those preparing educators in linguistically diverse regions.

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