

# Issues with English Pronunciation Instruction for Students in Vietnam

Nguyen Van Ut\*

\*Lecturer, Bac Lieu University

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**Abstract:** This article examines the challenges and potential solutions associated with pronunciation instruction in the Vietnamese context. Research highlights issues such as insufficient practice opportunities, interference from the native language, and teachers' limited expertise. To address these challenges, the article proposes solutions including online language exchange platforms, English language cafés, multimedia resources, professional training, and enhanced listening skills.

**Keywords:** Pronunciation, Vietnam setting, problem, solution

## 1. Introduction

Effective pronunciation instruction is a crucial component of language learning, as it significantly influences a learner's ability to communicate intelligibly and fluently in a foreign language. In the context of Vietnam, where English is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for personal and professional development, the importance of teaching pronunciation is undeniable. However, the process of teaching pronunciation in Vietnam presents a myriad of challenges that educators, learners, and policymakers must grapple with. These challenges arise from a combination of linguistic differences between English and Vietnamese, limited access to quality pronunciation resources, and pedagogical practices that may not prioritize pronunciation as they should. This essay explores one of the common problems in teaching pronunciation in the Vietnamese context, shedding light on the factors that hinder effective pronunciation instruction and proposing potential solutions to address these issues.

## 2. Statement of problem

The teaching of pronunciation in second language acquisition has long been recognized as a complex and multifaceted challenge (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Numerous factors contribute to the intricate nature of this problem. Firstly, the inherent differences in phonetic systems between the learners' native language and the target language can lead to mispronunciations and interference effects (Derwing & Munro, 2015). These differences encompass segmental features such as consonants and vowels, as well as suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns (Celce-Murcia, 2010).

Secondly, the absence of clear assessment criteria for pronunciation skills exacerbates the problem (Pennington & Richards, 1986). In many language assessment frameworks, pronunciation is often treated as a peripheral aspect of language proficiency, with a limited focus on discrete pronunciation tasks (Lennon, 1990). This underemphasis on pronunciation assessment can lead to neglect and insufficient attention to this crucial skill, hindering learners' motivation to improve their pronunciation.

Moreover, the proliferation of non-native English accents in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts (Jenkins, 2000) has raised questions about the relevance of native-like pronunciation. While striving for native-like pronunciation remains a goal for many learners, there is an ongoing debate about whether this should be the ultimate objective in a globalized world where English is predominantly used for international communication.

Vietnamese language learners, like those in other parts of the world, struggle greatly with acquiring English pronunciation for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons is the absence of immersive English-speaking environments in Vietnam, where learners can practice and refine their pronunciation skills. Limited exposure to native speakers and opportunities for real-life communication can impede learners' ability to develop natural intonation and speech patterns.

In this essay, I will explore this challenge in greater detail, analyze its impact on English pronunciation acquisition, and propose solutions to address them effectively. By addressing these issues, we can contribute to more successful English language education in Vietnam, ultimately improving learners' ability to communicate fluently and accurately in

English.

### **3. Studies on pronunciation teaching and learning**

Significant research has been conducted in Vietnam on the pronunciation of English by Vietnamese students. Vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation were all included in these pronunciation characteristics. Few studies have been conducted by Vietnamese teachers to investigate learner difficulties in learning English pronunciation from the learners' perspective. According to Yen (2016), the most difficult aspects of learning English pronunciation are English stress, rhythm, and intonation, followed by being heavily influenced by mother tongue. Her research also revealed that the difficulties in learning English pronunciation stem primarily from their learning methods as well as a lack of real-world opportunities to use English. Ngan (2018) discovered that students did not have enough time to practice English pronunciation during in-class work periods, which is one of the main factors affecting learners' pronunciation skills. Furthermore, only a few studies have been conducted to investigate the challenges of teaching English pronunciation. Yen (2016) discovered that teaching behavior appears to be the most problematic to Vietnamese teachers, followed by lack of confidence and poor English proficiency, in her study of learner beliefs about the problems that their teachers have when teaching pronunciation.

### **4. The situation of pronunciation teaching in Vietnam**

The state of pronunciation teaching in Vietnam has evolved over the years, reflecting the country's commitment to improving English language proficiency. In recent decades, English has become a compulsory subject in Vietnamese schools, and there has been a growing emphasis on pronunciation as a vital component of language learning. Therefore, pronunciation teaching in Vietnam has been a significant aspect of English language education, given the increasing importance of English proficiency in global communication and business. However, the current state of pronunciation teaching faces several challenges in the Vietnam context, primarily due to a lack of exposure to native English speakers.

#### **4.1. Current status of teaching English pronunciation in classrooms**

The state of English learning quality in Vietnam remains a difficult issue for both parents and educators. Poor pronunciation is one of the

primary causes of unsatisfactory results when learning English. When communicating in English, poor pronunciation leads to a lack of confidence. Furthermore, correct pronunciation is required if you want to listen well. Correct pronunciation teaches students how to pronounce words correctly. This is a factor that promotes the effectiveness of listening comprehension skills, and English learners will find it easier to listen to and understand videos, radio, or conversations as a result of this factor. When hearing someone else say the same word, mispronouncing it will cause difficulty or even failure to understand. In addition, good pronunciation will encourage listeners to pay attention to the speaker. Communication will be difficult if English speakers pronounce words too differently from native speakers.

#### **4.2. Challenges faced by teachers and students**

Despite these efforts, teachers and students in Vietnam encounter numerous challenges in the realm of pronunciation teaching. One of the most prominent challenges is the limited exposure to native English speakers. It is claimed that the scarcity of native English speakers in the country inhibits learners from developing authentic pronunciation skills. This lack of exposure leads to difficulties in mastering English phonemes, stress patterns, and intonation.

Furthermore, learners often struggle with the interference of Vietnamese phonological features. Vietnamese is a tonal language with a distinct set of vowel sounds and syllable structures, which differ significantly from those in English. These linguistic differences can result in persistent pronunciation errors and difficulties in distinguishing between similar English sounds.

Another challenge is the shortage of qualified teachers with expertise in pronunciation instruction. Many English teachers in Vietnam have received their education from non-native speakers or have limited exposure to authentic English pronunciation themselves. This lack of expertise can hinder effective pronunciation instruction and reinforce incorrect pronunciation habits among students.

### **5. Solutions**

#### **5.1. Online Language Exchange Platforms**

One effective solution to address the issue of limited exposure to native speakers is the use of online language exchange platforms. These platforms connect learners with native English speakers worldwide, enabling them to engage in virtual conversations and receive real-time pronunciation feedback. Websites and apps like iTalki, Tandem, and

HelloTalk facilitate language exchange partnerships and provide a valuable opportunity for learners in Vietnam to interact with native speakers.

### 5.2. *Language Cafés and Conversation Groups*

Language cafés and conversation groups can be organized within educational institutions or communities to bring together learners and native English speakers for face-to-face interaction. These informal gatherings provide a relaxed setting for practicing pronunciation and improving listening skills. They can also create a sense of community and motivation for learners to engage with native speakers.

### 5.3. *Utilizing Multimedia Resources*

Teachers and learners can take advantage of multimedia resources that feature native English speakers. Incorporating authentic audio and video materials into lessons exposes learners to natural pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. High-quality multimedia resources, such as BBC Learning English and the British Council's Learn English, offer pronunciation practice exercises and authentic content created by native speakers.

### 5.4. *Professional Pronunciation Training*

Institutions can consider offering specialized pronunciation training courses conducted by native English-speaking instructors. These courses can focus on targeted pronunciation challenges commonly faced by Vietnamese learners. Professional guidance can help learners correct specific pronunciation errors and work toward achieving a more authentic accent.

## 6. Conclusion

A key component of language learning is effective pronunciation instruction, which has a significant impact on a learner's capacity for fluid and understandable communication in a foreign language. Derwing and Munro (2015) emphasize how good pronunciation improves speaking and listening abilities, which strengthens overall language competency. The importance of teaching pronunciation is evident in the context of Vietnam, where English proficiency is increasingly necessary for one's personal and professional development.

The limited exposure to native English speakers has been a recurring issue in teaching pronunciation in the Vietnamese setting throughout this article. This problem is caused by a number of things, such as linguistic variances, a lack of precise evaluation standards, and shifting ideas about what constitutes native-like pronunciation. The scarcity

of opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers hinders their ability to acquire accurate pronunciation, thereby impeding their overall language proficiency.

It is crucial to address the issue of restricted exposure to native speakers in Vietnam's quest for English language excellence. Educators, learners, and policymakers may support more effective English language learning in Vietnam by putting the suggested solutions into practice and highlighting the significance of pronunciation in language instruction. This promotes more global connectivity and possibilities by providing learners with the tools they need to communicate clearly and confidently on a global scale.

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