

Teaching English Pronunciation
at
University Level in Vietnam

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved father, whose love and support will forever be a source of power for his children to go far and live happily, whatever ways they choose to live.

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Abstract

The development of L2 pronunciation has long been considered a challenge for adult learners. Vietnamese students of English in particular face difficulties because of the phonological distance between the two languages. This issue is especially significant in ELT because learners who are proficient in other aspects (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) of an L2 may be much less so in their pronunciation resulting in problems of intelligibility, and thus face problems of access to social, educational and occupational opportunities. While L1 influence is a major factor in developing L2 pronunciation, factors such as teachers' and learners' views of the importance of pronunciation, pedagogical practices, the affordances and constraints of a particular pedagogical context are equally as important, however under-researched they are.

The present study is located at a Vietnamese university and investigates pronunciation pedagogy in an English Preparation Course at this university, which prepares undergraduate students to do subjects of their majors instructed in English. It is principally qualitative in approach, drawing on data from the observation of 20 classes and the interviews with 10 teachers. The findings from these data are complemented by the analysis of data gathered in focus groups and via survey questionnaires administered to 87 students across different levels of English proficiency, as well as the analysis of curriculum documents. The thesis draws upon several theories of language teaching and language learning. Its fundamental focus is on teachers and learners, their views and experiences.

The study provides deep insights into pronunciation pedagogy at the university level in Vietnam. This knowledge was gained through the exploration of teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practice as well as students' beliefs, practice, and aspirations concerning pronunciation learning. The study first revealed that in contrast to the official curriculum in which pronunciation was absent, teachers and students placed a high value on improving pronunciation. Secondly, the study investigated what teachers and students viewed as varieties of English that were appropriate as instructional models, and varieties that were desirable and realistic targets for students' production. By interviewing teachers and observing their classroom practices, aspects of English pronunciation which were taught and how they were taught were able to be identified

and analysed in detail. Also, the study uncovered many kinds of constraints that impacted on both teachers and students in pronunciation teaching and learning including: the curriculum, teacher training, teachers' knowledge and confidence, and teaching resources. Consequently, the treatment of pronunciation was found to be less than what both teachers and students felt was necessary. However, the study also revealed the potentials and opportunities for the development of pronunciation in Vietnamese ELT; these were found in the interest and strong efforts of several teachers to teach and, especially, of learners to learn English pronunciation both within and beyond the classroom. Finally, this study identified learners' subjective needs and interests in pronunciation learning, and their sense of 'selves' when using English as important areas that should be granted due attention in Vietnamese EFL classes.