
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Investigation into Difficulties in Teaching Pronunciation to First-Year English Majors at Dong Nai University

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| ABSTRACT

This paper aims to find out the difficulties the teachers of English at Dong Nai University (DNU) meet when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. The participants of the study are the students and the teachers from the Department of foreign languages of DNU. The main research tool is a questionnaire survey. Eight teachers and sixty students from three classes respond to the survey. The findings show that the teachers find it difficult to teach students with poor phonetic ability, with pronunciation problems of English consonants, stress and intonation. Furthermore, teachers have trouble with being reluctant to improve the pronunciation of their students. Difficulties arising from physical conditions such as classroom's facilities, class size, and mixed ability are the teachers' problems when teaching pronunciation. Some suggestions to minimize the difficulties of pronunciation teaching faced by the teachers are also given in the paper.

| KEYWORDS

Pronunciation, first-year English majors, pronunciation problems

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 20 May 2023

PUBLISHED: 27 May 2023

DOI: 10.32996/jeltal.2023.5.2.17

1. Introduction

Pronunciation plays an important role in language teaching and learning for its contribution to successful communication. According to Celce-Murica & Brinton & Goodwin (2002, p.7), "there is a threshold level of pronunciation in English such that if a given nonnative speaker's pronunciation falls below this level, no matter how good his or her control of English grammar and vocabulary might be", he or she will not be able to communicate orally with native speakers of English. The speakers will be unintelligible if they have poor pronunciation. It is a fact that many learners of English as a second language have major difficulties with English pronunciation, often even after years of English lessons (Fraser, 2000). This could be the result of not having the proper training in pronunciation at the early stage of learning a language. Hence, pronunciation teaching should be emphasized at the beginning of English language teaching so that it helps learners to be intelligible.

Despite the significance of pronunciation, the reality is that in many English language classrooms in Vietnam, little attention is paid to teaching pronunciation. That is because of many reasons. Firstly, the teachers often find that they do not have enough time in class to give proper attention to this aspect of English instruction, as Gilbert (2008)'s argues in her paper. Secondly, when they do find the time to address pronunciation, the instruction often amounts to the presentation and practice of a series of boring and seemingly unrelated topics. Gilbert says that the use of drilling sounds over and over again (e.g., minimal pair work) often leads to discouraging results, and discouraged students and teachers end up wanting to avoid pronunciation altogether. Because the students are not trained in pronunciation properly, they have a lot of pronunciation problems, such as sound confusion, sound omission, and sound deletion. This urges the need to find out the challenges the teachers face when teaching pronunciation. However, there have been few types of research focusing on these issues. Studies done by Murphy (2011) and Tergujeff (2012)

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explore the process of what and how English pronunciation is taught in EFL environments. Relating to the problems of learning and teaching English pronunciation, researchers of Jahan (2011); Akram & Qureshi (2012) dig into these issues. However, their papers focus on non-English major students. In the context of Vietnam, research done by Tran, T.A (2012) and Hoang, T.D (2010) found difficulties in learning at the high school level. Nguyen, T.M (2008) conducted a study investigating teacher beliefs and practices in the teaching of pronunciation at a university. No researches focus on the issues of difficulties teachers encounter when teaching English to first-year English majors in a pronunciation course. The researcher has been teaching English pronunciation to first-year English major students of Dong Nai University (DNU), and she finds that many teachers at DNU face challenges when giving pronunciation instruction to first-year English majors. Therefore, the author decided to do research on difficulties faced by DNU teachers in teaching English pronunciation to first-year English majors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronunciation

2.1.1 Definitions

This section provides different definitions of pronunciation proposed by researchers. Some definitions are similar, and some are not alike. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994, p.7) refer to pronunciation as a significant sound production in two senses.

Firstly, "pronunciation is defined as the production and reception of sounds of speech" because of the fact that sound is part of a code of any language (Dalton and Seidlhofer,1994:3). Secondly, pronunciation is defined as a significant code of sound that is "combined with other factors to make communication possible" because it is used to address message in the context of use. The second sense considers pronunciation in connection with acts of speaking. However, Dalton and Seidlhofer give particular focus to the notion that pronunciation refers to the physical features of sound that are "relevant in the achievement of meaning" in communication (p.3).

Cook (1996) considers pronunciation as a set of habits for producing sounds. The habit of producing a sound is acquired by repeating it over and over again and by being corrected when it is pronounced wrongly. Learning to pronounce a second language means building up new pronunciation habits and overcoming the bias of the first language.

Richards and Renendya (2002, as cited in Varasarin) share the same definition as Cook's when referring to pronunciation as the role of individual sounds and sound segments in speaking.

2.2 The significance of teaching pronunciation

Many researchers agreed that only until recently, pronunciation teaching had been labeled "the Cinderella of TESOL"(Kelly, 1969; Dalton, 1997). Pronunciation is considered a prominent factor in English language teaching because of its contribution to the success of communication, the most important component of any human society. Without pronunciation, learners have many difficulties in getting their speech understood and understanding others. Misunderstanding, communication breakdown or failure may occur due to mispronunciation. C gives an example of mispronouncing a range of phonemes that leads to the failure of communication.

When a learner says, for example, **soap** in a situation such as a restaurant where they should have said **soup**, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding (at least on the part of the waitress). A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language community to understand. (p.11)

As the example above shown, the speaker mispronounces the diphthong/əʊ/. This makes the listener misunderstand what the speaker wants. This example reveals that it can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker. Because of the importance of pronunciation in communication, many researchers assert that good pronunciation may make communication easier and more relaxed and thus more successful (Dan,2006). On the contrary, poor pronunciation can condemn learners to less social, academic and work advancement than they deserve (Fraser, 2000). Therefore, it is desirable to teach pronunciation to the students. Pronunciation is the foundation of speaking or, in other words. It is the sub-skill of speaking. Traditionally, students often neglected pronunciation. However, in the communicative approach, Morley (1998) states that pronunciation plays an important role in overall communicative competence, and therefore pronunciation teaching is an essential part of any course designed. This approach supports the goal of teaching pronunciation following the current perspective. It means that students are not required to have a

native-like pronunciation but an intelligible one. This is a kind of “accepted pronunciation”, which means students may make some mistakes, but they do not negatively affect the comprehension of the listeners or cause misunderstanding.

Harmer (2001, as cited in Shoostari, Mehrabi and Mousavinia, 2013) shares the same view of points as Morley. He states that teaching pronunciation not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features (and what these mean) but also can improve their speaking immeasurably. He also believes that focusing on sounds, showing where they are made in the mouth, and making students aware of where words should be stressed—all these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility.

Generally, teaching pronunciation serves an important role in helping learners develop ways of improving their pronunciation and shaping their attitude toward the importance of pronunciation (Richards & Renandya, 2002, cited in Varasarin, 2007). Learners' confidence in their pronunciation allows them to communicate more successfully in the target language (Fraser 1999, as cited in Varasarin, 2007).

2.3 Review of previous studies

There have been research studies focusing on teaching and learning pronunciation at high school and university levels.

In the context of Vietnam, at the high school level, Tran, T.A (2012) made a study of teaching pronunciation to tenth grade students at Thanh Liem high school, Ha Nam province. Her paper was conducted to investigate teachers' and students' attitude toward teaching and learning pronunciation as well as their difficulties in teaching and learning English pronunciation to 10th grade students at Thanh Liem C high school in Ha Nam province. Five teachers of English at Thanh Liem C high school and 100 tenth-grade students were the participants of the study. Questionnaires and interviews were the main tools of the research paper. The results reported that teachers and students at Thanh Liem C high school have negative attitudes toward teaching and learning pronunciation. There are internal and external factors causing difficulties in teaching and learning pronunciation in English 10. Furthermore, some pedagogical implications are offered to help teachers and students at this school improve their situation better.

At the university level, Nguyen, T.M (2008) conducted a paper with the title “*Teaching Pronunciation to first-year students at the University of Transport and Communications.*” Nineteen teachers of English UTC participated in the study by responding to the questionnaire and interview. The findings indicate that all the teachers have strong beliefs, enough confidence and knowledge to teach pronunciation. However, the goal of teaching pronunciation and the framework of assessment have not been set up within the curricula under regulation, so there is a lack of teachers' roles in their teaching. All elements of pronunciation are taught with different approaches and techniques. But there is no balance in the treatment of segmental elements and suprasegmental elements. The results also present strengths and shortcomings in the teaching of pronunciation and provide implications to facilitate the teaching of pronunciation.

Dao, T. P (2011)'s thesis concentrated on finding out difficulties the first year students majoring in English at Hanam Teachers Training College meet when learning English pronunciation and found out possible causes of such difficulties. Eighty first-year students of the college took part in the research. The data was collected by means of survey questionnaire, interview and class observation. The results indicated that the first-year English majors at Hanam Teachers Training College shared common difficulties in pronouncing English with most Vietnamese learners. However, due to the local accents, they make other typical mistakes with certain vowel and consonant sounds. Some pedagogical implications about the techniques of teaching pronunciation are given to help the first year students' pronunciation learning better.

In the context of Bangladesh, Jahan (2011)'s study entitled “*Teaching and learning pronunciation in ESL/EFL classes of Bangladesh*” aims at finding out the difficulties that teachers and students face in learning and teaching pronunciation at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Fifty-one teachers from private and public universities in Bangladesh are selected to participate in the study. The teachers are given a questionnaire to fill in. And the students from different universities in Bangladesh arranged Focus Group Discussions to join. The findings show that the students' poor pronunciation becomes the cause of anxiety for teachers. There is a need to improve students' pronunciation. Some pedagogical suggestions are proposed to assist the teaching and learning of pronunciation

The researches above mainly focus on the problems of teaching and learning. However, the subjects of the studies are non-English majors. The pronunciation teaching, as shown in the previous section, is very important. Therefore, it is necessary to do research on this issue. Nguyen, T.M (2008)'s thesis has given contribution to pronunciation teaching. However, her work is useful for teachers of English conducting teaching pronunciation to first year non-English majors at UTC. Although Dao, T. P (2011) surveys first-year

English majors. She refers to the difficulties of pronunciation learning. Hence, this paper aims to explore the difficulties of teachers when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. It is intended to investigate problems of pronunciation teaching in terms of difficulties from learners, difficulties from teachers and difficulties from physical conditions. The following section shows the conceptual framework which is going to be used in the survey.

2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The questionnaire items for the teacher respondent are intended to design in terms of difficulties arising from students and difficulties arising from physical conditions. Many of the questionnaire items are adapted from previous work. Each section of the questionnaire will be described clearly as follows

2.4.1 Difficulties arising from the students

The author suggests hypothetical difficulties which teachers at DNU encounter when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. According to her teaching experiences and what she has read in previous studies of problems in pronunciation teaching, students' problems in pronunciation cause a lot of trouble for teachers. There are four hypothetical difficulties from students adopted by Jahan (2011) (see Appendix C)

1. You are not able to understand your students for their poor pronunciation
2. Students don't understand you because they are not good listeners
3. Students are highly influenced by their mother tongue
4. Students are reluctant to improve my pronunciation

The classroom interaction between the teacher and students may not be successful if the students have poor pronunciation. Besides, motivation affects the learning of pronunciation. Motivation makes people more active in learning. The more motivated the people are, the greater the cognitive process is. This can make language teaching and learning successful. The low motivation of the learners could be a challenge in teaching pronunciation. Therefore, it is necessary to find out whether the learners are interested in the lessons or not. The author develops the next hypothetical difficulty as follows:

- Students have low motivation in pronunciation activities
It is difficult for teachers to teach passive learners or learners who are nervous about speaking in front of a crowd. If they don't take part in communicative practice, their teachers could not realize the mistakes of pronunciation they make to help them improve their pronunciation. For this reason, the researcher hypothesizes some more difficulties faced by teachers according to factors in Biyaem (1997). These are factors in pronunciation errors. They are:
- Interference from the mother tongue, particularly in pronunciation, syntax, and idiomatic usage.
- Lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives.
- Unchallenging English lessons.
- Being passive learners
- Being too shy to speak English with classmates.
- Lack of responsibility for their own learning.

The author uses factors such as "being passive learners" and "being too shy to speak English with classmates" as conceptual frameworks for the two next hypothetical difficulties. Students' pronunciation errors could make the teacher find hard to deal with because many of them have fossilized pronunciation errors.

When their habit of making pronunciation mistakes is fossilized, it is hard for teachers to correct it. When teaching pronunciation, the teacher should find out the pronunciation problems of the students to help them overcome them so that the pronunciation teaching can be better. As Doff (1988, p. 113) shows, there are pronunciation problems faced by EFL learners of English.

- Difficulties in pronouncing sounds which do not exist in the student's own language. For example, the consonant /ð/ is of great hard for Vietnamese students of English because this sound does not exist in the Vietnamese language.
- Confusion of similar sounds, e.g. /ɪ/ and /i:/.
- Difficulty in pronouncing consonant clusters.
- Tendency to give all syllables equal stress and "flat" intonation.

From the theories, the researcher supposes that the teacher will find it difficult to improve students with lots of mistakes of mispronouncing words or misusing intonation or stress. Therefore, the two next hypothetical difficulties are

- Students find it difficult to learn English, stress
- Students find it difficult to learn the English intonation

Due to the lack of time, the survey only makes focus on exploring students' problems with English word-final consonants. The three last hypothetical difficulties are adopted from Ngo, T. T. (2011). These are problems relating to pronouncing consonant sounds at the end of words. To know more about the theories of English consonant sounds, the theories below are indicated. **English ending sounds** (Ngo, T.T (2011)

To ESL learners, the term "ending sounds" is familiar as it refers to those ultimate sounds in a word. More precisely, it refers to the consonant sound(s), as the word can end with one or more consonant sounds (consonant clusters). Thus "ending sounds" in English pronunciation can be defined as those consonant sounds which appear at the very end of words. They are also called Codas: "The coda is the final consonant or consonant cluster" (Barbara A.H and Brian B, 1997).

According to Cummins (1998), almost every English consonant appears word-finally, except for /h/, /w/, and /j/.

2.4.1.1 Vietnamese ending sounds

According to Ngo (2005), the Vietnamese syllable structure is shown below.

Tone			
Initial consonants	Labialization	Nuclear vowel	Final consonant/ Semi-vowel

(Ngo, 2005: 7)

In Vietnamese, the number of codas available is just limited to a certain portion.

According to Nguyen (2007), there are only six consonants and two semi-vowels which can stand in word-final position; however, the important vowels that usually decide the pronunciation of final consonants are rounded /u, ɔ:, ɒ/, and front /i, e,/. The author adapts the three items from Ngo, T. T (2011). They are presented below

- Students are not able to pronounce word-final consonants
- Students pronounce word-final consonants incorrectly
- Students leave off word-final consonants

2.4.2 Difficulties arising from physical conditions

Physical conditions refer to something in the classroom, such as the classroom's size, classroom's facilities (chairs, desks, tables, electric facilities...). Harmer (1991) states that physical conditions have a great effect on learning and can alter a learner's motivation either positively or negatively. The physical condition affects both teacher's and the student's motivation. The large class and the poor facilities will decrease the relationship between teacher and students, and as a result, will decrease motivation. The teacher will find difficulties if the physical condition is not good; hence, the two hypothetical difficulties below investigate whether the teachers have problems with the physical conditions or not

- Classroom facilities (chairs, desks, tables, electric facilities..)
- Class size (overcrowded classes)

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The present study seeks to answer the following question:

"What difficulties do teachers of English at DNU encounter in teaching pronunciation to first year English majors?"

3.2 Research design

The purpose of this study is to find out the difficulties facing teachers of English at DNU when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. The difficulties are identified in terms of difficulties arising from the learners and difficulties arising from physical conditions. When the difficulties are clarified, skill development, practice, and classroom activities will be taken into consideration.

The paper is conducted when the students reach summer vacation; consequently, the researcher meets some obstacles when collecting the data. However, with the kindness of teacher respondents and student respondents, the data is obtained as the author's desire.

3.3 Participants

The survey is carried out with the participation of eight teachers of English and sixty first-year English majors from the Department of Foreign Languages at Dong Nai University.

3.4 Instrument

The main tool of the study is the questionnaire survey.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

In order to find out the answers to the research question and collect general data from the teachers and the students, there are two questionnaire surveys designed. One questionnaire survey is for teachers and one for the students.

The questionnaire for teachers comprises of five questions. Four of them are closed-ended questions, and the last one is open-ended. The first three questions explore teachers' attitudes towards their students' pronunciation competence. The fourth question investigates teachers' difficulties in teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. This part of the questionnaire asked the participants to make scalar judgments on a five-point scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree; 3=Neutral, 2= disagree; 1=strongly disagree). (See Appendix A). The fifth question asks for teachers' recommendations for bettering pronunciation teaching.

The questionnaire for students includes three questions. The first one aims to discover difficulties the students meet when learning pronunciation. This question requires the learner participants to answer by using a five-point scale (5=Strongly agree, 4=agree; 3=Neutral, 2= disagree; 1=strongly disagree). (See Appendix B). The two closed-ended questions seek students' other difficulties in pronunciation learning and their suggestions for improving pronunciation teaching.

3.5. Data collection procedure

The research is intended to implement in two months. The first month involves gathering data and interpreting the results. The last month is for writing the paper. Data collection is going to be conducted as follows:

For the first week, a survey questionnaire is delivered to teachers to investigate their difficulties in teaching pronunciation to first year English majors.

In the same week, a questionnaire survey is sent to students. When the students receive the questionnaires, the researcher provides some help for them to finish the survey well. Instructions to do each part of the questionnaire were given with the hope that the students would be clear with what the writers wanted them to do in the questionnaire. Some questions will be translated into Vietnamese so that the participants don't find it difficult to respond. After the questionnaires are collected, the researcher checks all of the questionnaires to make sure that the students answer all of the questions. In case there are any respondents who left an unanswered question, they are asked to complete it.

In week 2: All the questionnaires are going to be checked. A Pilot study is going to be conducted to measure the reliability level of the questionnaire items. By using SPSS version 11.5, an analysis of item reliability is determined through the reliability of the coefficient test. If the value of Cronbach's Alpha is below 0.7, the questionnaire items are not reliable and need to be revised. In week 3, the researcher delivers the questionnaire again if she has revised the questionnaire. In week 4, the researcher analyzes the data and interprets the result. The last four weeks are for finishing the project writing.

3.6 Data analysis procedure

The data is analyzed by the SPSS program version 11.5. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics are conducted to determine the frequency and the mean score. The findings are given through the interpretation of the results presented in the tables.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of the Study

4.1.1 Framework of analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire survey of the teachers and students are analyzed in the following framework.

For questionnaire delivery for the teachers, the data gained from questions 1 to 3 is analyzed according to the percentage of the respondents who choose the options. Question 4 is analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage and mean score.

For the questionnaire survey responded to by students, question 1 is analyzed according to frequency, percentage and mean score.

Question 5 in the teacher survey and questions 2 and 3 in the student questionnaire are open-ended; as a result, the researcher collects opinions from the respondents and presents them in the study.

4.2 Discussion of Results

The tables below show the results of the survey.

4.2.1 Results of the Questionnaire to teacher respondents

❖ Question 1

Question 1	Not good at	OK	Not good at
How good are you at teaching pronunciation?	0 (0%)	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)

Table 1 As the result shown in Table 1, many of the teachers' pronunciation teaching competence is rather good because 62.5 % of them choose the option "OK", and 37.5 % consider that they are good at teaching pronunciation.

❖ Question 2

Question 2	Strongly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Strongly Dissatisfied
Are you satisfied with the students' pronunciation level when they start their pronunciation course?	0 0%	0 0%	1 12.5%	6 75%	1 12.5%

Table 2

As seen in Table 2, most of the teachers (75%) are dissatisfied with students' pronunciation level when they start the course. This means that students' pronunciation is not good, and this can make the teachers find it hard when teaching those students.

❖ Question 3

Question 3	80% or above	70% or above	60% or above	50% or above	Less than 50%
How many students in your class are really poor in pronunciation?	0 0%	0 0%	2 25%	5 62.5%	1 12.5%

Table 3

Table 3 demonstrates that 50% or above of the students are poor in pronunciation. This requires teachers to make great efforts to help the students improve their pronunciation. As a result, it could be a challenge to the teachers.

Question 4 aims to seek for difficulties the teachers encounter when teaching pronunciation. In this question, all responses given by the respondents were rated according to five point Likert scale: 5= Strongly agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree. The mean score above 3.0 indicates a high level of agreement employed, and below 3.0 shows a low level of agreement with the difficulties. The results from the first part of the question are presented below

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	St. Deviation
	5	4	3	2	1		
a1. Students' phonetic ability is poor	0 0%	4 50%	1 12.5%	3 37.5%	0 0%	3.13	0.991
a2. Students don't understand me because they are not a good listener	0 0%	0 0%	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	1.87	0.835
a3. Students are highly influenced by their mother tongue.	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	3 37.5%	0 0%	3 37.5%	3.00	1.069
a4. Students have low motivation in pronunciation activities.	0 0%	0 0%	3 37.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	2.00	0.926
a5. Students are too shy to speak English with classmates.	0 0%	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	0 0%	2.88	0.835
a6. Students are passive learners	0 0%	1 12.5%	4 50%	1 12.5%	2 25%	2.5	1.069
a7. Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation.	1 12.5%	5 62.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	0 0%	3.75	0.886
a8. Students are not able to pronounce word-final consonants.	0 0%	1 12.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	2 25%	2.25	1.035
a9. Students pronounce word-final consonants incorrectly	0 0%	3 37.5%	1 12.5%	4 5%	0 0%	2.88	0.991
a10. Students leave off word-final consonants.	2 25%	4 50%	2 25%	0 0%	0 0%	4.00	0.756
a11. I find it difficult to learn English stress.	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	0 0%	0 0%	3.88	0.835
a12. I find it difficult to learn English intonation.	3 37.5%	5 62.5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	4.38	0.518

Table 4. Teacher perceptions of difficulties deriving from the students

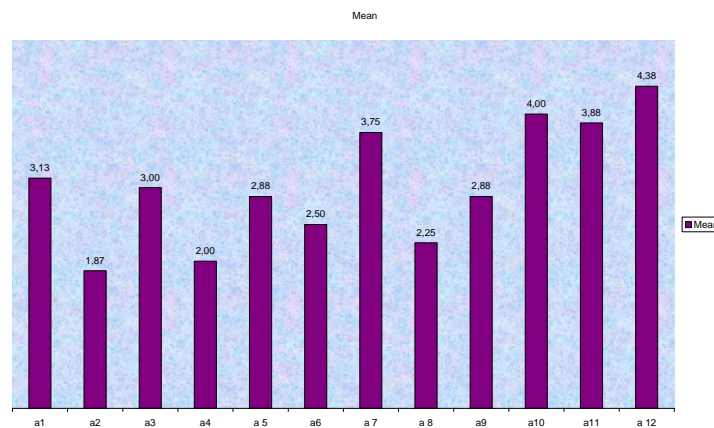


Chart 1 Means of difficulties deriving from students perceived by teachers

As shown in *Table 4* and *Chart 1*, The teachers have a high level of agreement with statement a12, with a mean score of **4.38**. This means that students' difficulties with English intonation can cause teacher trouble when teaching this element of pronunciation. The teacher should find out effective ways to help learners acquire this aspect successfully. The next high level of agreement is revealed in statement a10 (M=4.0). The majority of the teacher respondents agree with students' problem of leaving word-final consonants when speaking. This problem can be fossilized, and it can make the teachers hard to correct such kind of mistakes. Students often are not aware of the concept of stress; hence, they tend to use equal stress when speaking. They not only have problems with word stress but also sentence stress. It is not easy for the teacher to help the students overcome this difficulty. That's the reason why most teachers consider that students' problems with English stress can be teachers' difficulty in pronunciation teaching, and English stress should be in consideration. Furthermore, they believe that stress is difficult to teach because the students have problems when learning English stress. This is clearly shown in the mean score of the statement a11 (M=3.88). The last high level of agreement is found in statement a7 (M=3.75). It means that students don't take responsibility for improving their pronunciation. The teacher could not spend most of the time improving students' pronunciation due to the limited time in class. Thus, it makes students find out ways to encourage students to improve their pronunciation outside of class.

The lowest mean score lies on statement a2 (M=1.87). The result demonstrates that the students and the teachers can communicate successfully in pronunciation classes. That is the reason why the teachers show their low agreement in this statement.

Statements	Yes		No	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
b1. Classroom facilities (desks, chairs, electric facilities..)	6	75%	2	25%
b2. Class size (overcrowded classes)	7	87.5%	1	12.5%
b3.others	3	37.5%	5	62.5%

Table 5 Difficulties arising from physical conditions

As can be seen in Table 5, the biggest problem of the teachers when teaching pronunciation is the class size. This is shown in the percentage of the teacher respondents who agree with the statement (87.5 %). Large classes could make the teacher hard to organize communicative activities. As a result, students have little opportunities to practice in class. This can decrease the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the teacher can't correct pronunciation mistakes for all of the members of the class. Therefore, there is a need to find out solutions for the large size of pronunciation classes. 75 % of the teacher respondents have problems with classroom facilities. Teaching facilities such as CD players or cassette players and head projectors need to be well-equipped in a pronunciation classroom so that the teaching and learning of pronunciation are effective. Besides problems with classroom facilities, and class size, 37,5 % of the teachers meet difficulty with the mixed ability of the students. They explain that the varied level of the students requires them to spend much time designing suitable activities for all of the levels. And they need to find out effective teaching methods so that all the students can benefit from every lesson.

4.2.2 Results of the Questionnaire to learner respondents

The table below indicates the results from question 1

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	St. Deviation
	5	4	3	2	1		
a1. My phonetic ability is poor	14 23.3%	24 40%	10 16.7%	12 20%	0 0%	3.67	1.052
a2. I don't understand the teacher because I'm not a good listener	10 16.7%	11 18.3%	10 16.7%	18 30%	11 18.3%	2.85	1.376
a3. I'm highly influenced by their mother tongue.	2 3.3%	21 35%	15 25%	15 25%	7 11.7%	2.93	1.103
a4. I have low motivation in pronunciation activities.	0 0%	5 8.3%	4 6.7%	44 73.3%	7 11.7%	2.12	0.715
a5. I'm too shy to speak English with my classmates.	3 5%	15 26%	17 28.3%	15 35%	10 16.7%	2.77	1.155
a6. I'm a passive learner.	1 1.7%	8 13.3%	9 15%	33 55%	9 15%	2.32	0.948

a7. I'm reluctant to improve my pronunciation.	1 1.7%	18 30%	22 36.7%	13 21.7%	6 10%	2.92	0.996
a8. I am not able to pronounce word-final consonants.	3 5%	24 40%	15 25%	12 20%	6 10%	3.10	1.100
a9. I pronounce word-final consonants incorrectly	1 1.7%	23 38.3%	8 13.3%	21 35%	7 11.7%	2.83	1.122
a10. I leave off word-final consonants.	10 16.7%	35 58.3%	3 5.0%	10 16.7%	2 3.3%	3.68	1.049
a11. I find it difficult to learn English stress.	10 16.7%	35 58.3%	5 8.3%	8 13.3%	2 3.3%	3.72	1.010
a12. I find it difficult to learn English intonation.	21 35%	20 33.3%	12 20%	6 10%	1 1.7%	3.90	1.053

Table 6 Learners' perceptions of difficulties deriving from themselves

As shown in the table, 12 items relating the difficulties of first-year English majors in pronunciation learning. The highest mean score found in item a12 (M=3.90) and item a11 (M=3.72) indicates that English intonation is a problem for the majority of students. Besides, students' English stress can make students hard to acquire. Many of the participants express their high agreement with item a10 (M=3.68). This means that they don't pronounce the final consonant sound. Leaving off the sound may cause misunderstanding in communication. Hence, teachers should pay attention to the pronunciation problems of the students when teaching English sounds. The learner respondents show a high level of agreement with item a1 (M=3.67). This shows that students' phonetic abilities could be in consideration. This result can be useful for teachers when teaching pronunciation. It is necessary to find out effective teaching methods to help the students overcome the obstacles.

The lowest mean score found in item a4 (M=2.12) revealed that a large number of the respondents are interested in pronunciation activities. When students are interested in learning pronunciation, they'll participate in classroom activities. This will help them improve their pronunciation and leads the teaching to become more effective.

❖ Question 5

The teacher respondents give some recommendations for bettering the teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors at DNU. They suggest that the teacher the ways to overcome difficulties in pronunciation teaching. For instance, attending regular workshops to exchange teaching experiences and train teachers' methodology, creating communicative pronunciation practice for students to take part in, using visual aids when teaching frequently, and finding effective teaching methods to improve students' problems with English consonants, stress and intonation.

4.3. Summary of major findings

From what is presented in the section above, some difficulties the teachers at DNU encounter when teaching pronunciation is clearly revealed. Problems the students face in pronunciation classes could cause trouble for the teachers. These main problems are:

- Students' phonetic ability is poor
- Students are reluctant to improve my pronunciation.
- Students find it difficult to learn English stress.
- Students find it difficult to learn English intonation.
- Students leave off word-final consonants

Moreover, the teachers find difficulty with physical conditions when teaching, as shown below

- Classroom's facilities
- Class size
- Mixed ability

Some recommendations from the teacher respondents are offered in the survey. They are presented below:

- Teachers should be provided with sufficient teaching facilities
- Teachers should create more communicative activities for students to take part in.

- Teachers should explore effective teaching methods to teach difficult aspects of pronunciation, such as English stress, English intonation
- Teachers should provide regular workshops or programs to exchange experiences and train teachers' methodology

It is hoped that the major findings above could be helpful for teachers of English at DNU. Through the finding, the teachers know the difficulties which they and their colleague face in pronunciation teaching. Consequently, they can have regular discussions about exploring teaching methods to teach pronunciation effectively.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Since the importance of pronunciation teaching in English language teaching, it is necessary to find out problems teachers face when conducting the teaching to help the teaching and learning of pronunciation become better. This paper aims to explore the difficulties the teachers of English at DNU encounter when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. As a result, difficulties arise from students, such as poor phonetic ability, reluctance to improve pronunciation or having pronunciation problems with English ending sounds, English stress and intonation. In addition, teachers have difficulties with physical conditions such as classroom facilities, class size, and mixed ability of the students. The teaching facilities are considered to be not well-equipped for pronunciation teaching. The overcrowded classes make teachers hard to organize communicative pronunciation practice for all of the students to participate in. The mixed ability of the students requires the teachers to find out effective techniques to help all of the students understand the lessons well. Those are obstacles the teachers have to cope with when teaching pronunciation at the Department of foreign languages at DNU. It is hoped that the paper, to some extent, may contribute to pronunciation teaching and learning at DNU.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

For difficulties arising from the students, it is recommended that the teachers should use various pronunciation techniques to help them to improve pronunciation problems related to English problematic sounds, stress and intonation. These pronunciation techniques are clearly described in Celcia-Murcia *et al.* (2001, 8:10). They are:

- Listen and imitate
- Phonetic training
- Minimal pair drills
- Contextualized minimal pairs
- Visual aids
- Tongue twisters
- Developmental approximation drills
- Practice vowel shifts and stress shifts related to affixation
- Reading aloud/recitation
- Recordings of learners' production

These techniques can facilitate teaching when teaching difficult English sounds as well as other elements of pronunciation. For difficulties arising from physical conditions, it is suggested that the administrators in DNU should care about providing well-equipped teaching facilities for the teachers so that teaching and learning become more effective. Besides, the teachers should explore teaching methods to deal with large classes to make pronunciation teaching and learning become effective.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire For Teachers Of English

The following questionnaire is conducted to investigate issues relating to the difficulties in teaching pronunciation to first- year English majors encountered by teachers of English at Dong Nai University. Your cooperation with the survey will be of great importance. You can be sure that you will not be identified in any discussion of the data, and the data will be used only for the purpose of research, not for any other purposes.

Please help me to complete this questionnaire by marking **(X)** for your answers unless otherwise stated.

Age: 21-30 31-40 41-50 51+

Gender: Male Female

Years of teaching experience: 0-1 1-5 5-10 10+

Having in charge of pronunciation classes for _____ years

Professional qualifications:

B.A. in English Language

M.A. in _____ Other: _____

1. How good are you at teaching pronunciation?

Not good at OK Good at

2. Are you satisfied with the students' pronunciation level while they start their pronunciation course? (Tick the best answer)

Strongly Satisfied

Satisfied

Neutral

Dissatisfied

Strongly Dissatisfied

3. How many students in your class are really poor in pronunciation?

80% or above 70% or above 60% or above

50% or above Less than 50%

4. Please mark the degree of agreement with difficulties which you are supposed to encounter when teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors. Please indicate your answer using the following 5-point scale where: [5= Strongly agree; 4= Agree; 3= Neutral; 2= Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree].

	a. Difficulties arising from your students	SA	A	N	D	SD
a1	Students' phonetic ability is poor	5	4	3	2	1
a2	Students don't understand the teachers because they aren't good listeners	5	4	3	2	1
a3	Students are highly influenced by their mother tongue.	5	4	3	2	1
a4	Students have low motivation in pronunciation activities	5	4	3	2	1
a5	Students are too shy to speak English with classmates.	5	4	3	2	1
a6	Students are passive learners	5	4	3	2	1
a7	Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation	5	4	3	2	1
a8	Students are not able to pronounce word-final consonants.	5	4	3	2	1
a9	Students pronounce word-final consonants incorrectly	5	4	3	2	1
a10	Students leave off word-final consonants.	5	4	3	2	1
a11	Students find it difficult to learn English stress	5	4	3	2	1
a12	Students find it difficult to learn English intonation	5	4	3	2	1

Others (please specify)

.....

5. What are your suggestions for bettering pronunciation teaching at DNU?

.....

b. Difficulties arising from physical conditions	YES	NO
b1. Classroom room facilities (desks, chairs, electric facilities,...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b2. Class size (overcrowded classes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b3. Others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

Thank You For Your Cooperation!

Appendix B: Questionnaire For The Students

Dear participants,

I'm doing my project on title "An investigation into difficulties in teaching pronunciation to first-year English majors at Dong Nai University". I must be grateful if you could take some time to answer the following questionnaire. Your responses are voluntary and confidential.

Please help me to complete this questionnaire by marking (X) for the best answer(s).

*** Personal information**

Gender: male female

- Name:.....

Age: - Class:

Please help me to complete this questionnaire by marking (X) for the best answer(s).

1. To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements relating to your difficulties when learning pronunciation?

Please indicate your answer using the following 5-point scale where: [5= Strongly agree; 4= Agree; 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree]. Mark (X) for each number.

	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1a.	My phonetic ability is poor	5	4	3	2	1
1b.	I don't understand the teacher because I'm not a good listener	5	4	3	2	1
1c.	I'm highly influenced by their mother tongue.	5	4	3	2	1
1d.	I have low motivation in pronunciation activities	5	4	3	2	1
1e.	I'm too shy to speak English with my classmates.	5	4	3	2	1
1f.	I'm a passive learner	5	4	3	2	1
1g.	I'm reluctant to improve my pronunciation	5	4	3	2	1
1h.	I'm not able to pronounce word-final consonants.	5	4	3	2	1
1i.	I pronounce word-final consonants incorrectly	5	4	3	2	1
1j.	I leave off word-final consonants.	5	4	3	2	1
1k.	I find it difficult to learn English stress	5	4	3	2	1
1l.	I find it difficult to learn the English intonation	5	4	3	2	1

2. What are other difficulties you may encounter when learning pronunciation?

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3. What are your recommendations for the improvement of teaching English pronunciation at your department of English?

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Thank You For Your Cooperation!

Appendix C (Jahan, 2011)

Personal Details: Name:

Designation:

Institution:

1. Are you satisfied with the students' pronunciation level when they start English Language Class? (Tick the best answer)

- a. Strongly Satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Dissatisfied
- e. Strongly Dissatisfied

2. How many students in your class are really poor in pronunciation?

- a. 80% or above
- b. 70% or above

- c. 60% or above
- d. 50% or above
- e. Less than 50%

3. Do you spend a significant amount of time in providing instruction to improve their pronunciation?

- Yes No

4. What are the problems you face in teaching pronunciation?

- You are not able to understand your students for their poor pronunciation.
- Students don't understand you because they are not a good listener
- Students are highly influenced by their mother tongue
- Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation
- Others (Write in one sentence)

.....
.....
.....

5. What kinds of help do you provide for improving your students' pronunciation?

- Teach them how to use a dictionary
- Detect their wrong pronunciation in class and correct immediately
- Use audio/ video taps in class
- Arrange a group discussion where peers are allowed to detect their partners' fault
- Teach them phonetics and phonology in detail.

6. What kinds of materials do you use in teaching pronunciation?

- Particular textbook Hand out

7. What is the most common activity that you follow while teaching pronunciation in language class?

- Imitation of sound and repetition of drills
- Self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech
- Performing dialogues
- Learning by rhymes or songs
- Practicing tongue twister

8. Do the students improve their pronunciation at the end of the course?

- Yes No