



## PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION IN VIETNAMESE TERTIARY SETTINGS: INSIGHTS FROM EFL TEACHERS' COGNITIONS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims at investigating teachers' cognitions and classroom practices towards pronunciation instruction in Vietnamese tertiary EFL classrooms. Participants included 76 Vietnamese EFL teachers in some universities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Data were collected through a questionnaire and classroom observations. The study findings showed that the teachers highlighted the importance of pronunciation teaching with a specific focus on communicative purposes. However, the results also indicated a mismatch between the teachers' stated cognitions about pronunciation instruction and their actual classroom practices. Therefore, this study gives recommendations for further research on exploring situational factors influencing pronunciation instruction as well as the need for teacher training.

**Keywords:** pronunciation instruction, teachers' cognitions, classroom practices

### **1. Introduction**

In the era of globalization, English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a compulsory subject in the Vietnamese educational system, from primary to tertiary levels. As a fundamental component of oral communication, pronunciation contributes substantially to the second language (L2) learners' communicative success (Darcy, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2015). Thus, pronunciation errors lead to misunderstandings and/or communication breakdowns no matter how good the learners are at grammar and structures (Baker, 2014; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Jarosz, 2019). In a similar vein, Nguyen et al. (2021, p. 2) argue that "*good pronunciation provides grounds for L2 learners' subsequent development of oral skills*". This view is supported by Darcy (2018, p. 14) who asserts that "*pronunciation training improves speaking abilities by helping learners to develop clear speaking skills*". Consequently, it is important that pronunciation be properly addressed in English

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language classrooms (Couper, 2017; Derwing, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Nguyen & Newton, 2020).

Scoping into EFL settings, research has shown that Vietnamese EFL teachers tend to teach towards exams that mainly focus on testing learners' linguistic knowledge (i.e., grammar and vocabulary) rather than language skills such as speaking skills (Ha & Murray, 2020; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). Given a strong focus on linguistic forms within English classrooms (Nguyen et al., 2015; Phan, 2017), many Vietnamese EFL learners have found it challenging to use English for oral interaction. Importantly, pronunciation as part of oral communication; therefore, receives little attention from both teachers and students in EFL classrooms. Accordingly, disregarding pronunciation instruction lies in the belief that integrating pronunciation into general skills classes is not feasible or at least very difficult (Darcy, 2018; Jarosz, 2019). In addition, it has been shown that the teachers' low confidence and lack of professional knowledge in pronunciation pedagogy is the principal reason which leads to the neglect of teaching pronunciation in EFL classrooms (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2020).

Within Vietnamese tertiary EFL contexts, pronunciation instruction is also underemphasized and frequently ignored in both published textbooks and classroom practices in spite of increasing research evidence for the effectiveness of properly organized pronunciation instruction (Nguyen & Newton, 2020). Since teachers' cognitions and practices are contextually situated, there is a strong need to extend this line of research to obtain more nuanced insights into Vietnamese EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching (PI) practices and related cognitions. Therefore, my study investigates how Vietnamese EFL teachers from different tertiary institutions teach pronunciation and their cognitions about pronunciation instruction.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Pronunciation

Pronunciation, according to Fraser (2006), is more than just a mental activity because it is a physical ability that needs practice. Basically, it is defined as "*all aspects of the oral production of language, including segments, prosody, voice quality and rate*" (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 5). Effective teachers therefore typically need to assist students through explicit instruction and extensive practice until they can apply what has been taught and practiced in oral communication (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018). Fraser (2006) and Derwing and Munro (2005) hold that such instruction and practice will help learners predict difficulties and set up opportunities for success.

Intelligibility and/or comprehensibility as an ultimate goal of English pronunciation instruction has led to a controversial issue of whether segmental or suprasegmental instruction better helps students achieve such a goal. There has been research showing that learners receiving instruction focused on suprasegmentals improved their comprehensibility more significantly than those working primarily on segmentals (e.g., Gordon et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it has been argued that teaching

suprasegmentals only may not be an optimal way but learners instead need instruction and practice on both types of features (Levis, 2018). In a similar vein, numerous scholars have agreed that segmentals and suprasegmentals help learners achieve intelligibility and/or comprehensibility so they both need to be adequately taught in language classrooms (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2015).

## 2.2 Pronunciation instruction approaches

Pronunciation can be addressed via either a *top-down* or *bottom-up* approach. The bottom-up approach is often useful for pronunciation teaching because teachers can start with phonemes and finish with communicative functions of stress, rhythm, tone and intonation (Pardede, 2018). Meanwhile, the top-down pronunciation instruction begins with suprasegmentals and then systematically progresses 'downwards' to segmental levels (Pennington, 2019). No matter which approach is adopted, numerous techniques can be employed in pronunciation instruction such as phonetic transcriptions, repetition drills, marking stress, listening discrimination or visual identification through dialogues (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Quoc et al., 2021) which are provided after the explicit teaching of the target features (Gordon, 2020; Pardede, 2018; Saito, 2011).

Research has shown that *explicit pronunciation instruction* helps learners improve their intelligibility and/or comprehensibility. For instance, studies by Peltola et al. (2014) and Al-Tamimi and Attamimi (2018) both confirmed the positive effects of explicit pronunciation instruction on learners' oral skills. Peltola et al. (2014) focused on teaching and learning English vowel duration and quality at a university. Particularly, in this research, the production of English vowels by 29 advanced EFL students in Finnish was recorded and examined by Audacity software. The results illustrated that the student participants' production of the target vowels approached a native-like level, suggesting that explicit teaching of pronunciation was beneficial for enhancing the students' speaking performances. In a more recent study, the quasi-experimental study by Al-Tamimi and Attamimi (2018), 60 Yemeni tertiary EFL students received explicit pronunciation teaching for 14 weeks, which was focused on teaching both segmental and suprasegmental features. Speaking tests, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The findings revealed that explicit pronunciation instruction was effective in helping the students improve their verbal communication skills.

Despite the growing research evidence on the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation instruction, many ESL/EFL teachers are reluctant to teach pronunciation explicitly in their language classes (Darcy, 2018; Derwing, 2018; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Kissling, 2013). One of the reasons for the teachers' reluctance is that they were not sufficiently trained and/or confident to teach pronunciation (Burri & Baker, 2019; Buss, 2016b). As such, many teachers have been relying on *corrective feedback* (CF) as an alternative to implementing pronunciation in their classes (Couper, 2019; Ha & Nguyen, 2021; Ha et al., 2021). For instance, a study about teachers' cognitions of CF on pronunciation teaching was examined by Couper (2019). Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Within the New Zealand context, the

participants were 19 English teachers recruited from five different institutes. The research findings indicated some gaps in relation to the teachers' knowledge and professional training; thus, an essential need for further research into precisely what makes CF more effective in English pronunciation instruction.

Even though numerous studies have consistently suggested that CF facilitates L2 learners' pronunciation improvement, it has been argued that CF is less likely to be beneficial to student learning if teachers just focus heavily on CF without explicit instruction that first helps students understand a target feature (Foote et al., 2016). Therefore, pronunciation learning requires both form- and meaning-focused practice (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018) and *communicative pronunciation instruction* (CPI) was advocated to address this need. In terms of applying CPI to tertiary EFL classes, Nguyen and Bui (2021) investigated the effectiveness of CPT in EFL classes and explored the beliefs of teachers and students towards the value of this teaching approach to English learning. Classroom observations, semi-structured individual interviews with six Vietnamese EFL teachers and focus group interviews with 24 students were used to gather data at a public university in Vietnam. In the research findings, both the teacher and student participants agreed that CPT was considered an effective approach to facilitate the students' pronunciation improvement as well as enhance their English listening and speaking skills.

### 2.3 Teacher cognitions

Teacher cognition is "*the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what teachers know, believe, and think*" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). In a broader sense, teacher cognitions (TC) refer to teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes about language and language teaching (Baker, 2014; Borg, 2003, 2012; Burri et al., 2017; Crookes, 2015), "*which are dynamic - i.e., defined and refined on the basis of educational and professional experiences throughout teachers' lives*" (Borg, 2006, p. 35).

In language education, TC play a crucial role since they shape the teacher's classroom events (Borg, 2003, 2006). Therefore, research into TC provides important understandings and insights that help inform educational changes regarding instructional material design, curriculum development and teacher education (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2015; Burri et al., 2017; Couper, 2016, 2021).

### 2.4 Classroom practices

Classroom practice is a process involving a variety of agents and interactions inside the class as a system that can be manifested in diverse formats and structures and can be influenced by multiple factors both inside and outside the classroom (Li & Oliveira, 2015). In other words, classroom practices are related to the actions and strategies teachers and students employ during the teaching and learning process in their classes.

## 2.5 Related studies

Over the past few decades, research on teachers' cognitions has received considerable attention for the purpose of understanding the interplay between teachers' cognitions and their classroom behaviors and practices (Baker, 2014; Birello, 2012; Borg, 2012; Couper, 2017, 2021; Gordon, 2019). Nevertheless, this line of research into pronunciation pedagogy is still a young domain and mainly focuses on teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching and how these interact with their classroom practices (Baker, 2014; Crookes, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2021; Nguyen & Newton, 2020).

Regarding exploring the beliefs and practices towards pronunciation instruction, Bai and Yuan (2019) conducted a study with 16 EFL teachers in Hong Kong. Data were collected from the teachers' written reflections and semi-structured interviews. The research results indicated the importance and goal of pronunciation teaching perceived by the teachers; however, they appeared unconfident and ill-prepared in their teaching practices. Therefore, it suggested that teacher education and professional development programs should be focused more on helping the teacher participants build up their confidence in teaching pronunciation. In another study, Buss (2016a) examined Brazilian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about pronunciation teaching through an online survey. The findings showed that the teacher participants had positive attitudes towards pronunciation teaching for communicative purposes. However, their teaching practices tended to be traditional (i.e., focused mainly on isolated sounds, problematic sound correction and repetition activities). In addition, it suggested that training courses should be organized for the teachers' professional development in the field of pronunciation instruction.

With respect to the New Zealand context, Couper (2017) investigated how ESL teachers perceived pronunciation instruction. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from 19 teachers who had different problems in teaching adult learners' pronunciation. Specifically, five main issues were explored: (1) training; (2) knowledge and confidence; (3) pronunciation goals; (4) teaching focus and identity; and (5) mixed-L1 classes. The findings revealed that the teacher participants most often focused on teaching segmental sounds rather than suprasegmental features as they lacked initial training and did not feel confident to teach pronunciation.

Within the Vietnamese EFL context, research on teachers' beliefs and pronunciation teaching practices has recently gained more attention. For instance, Tran and Nguyen (2020) investigated what beliefs teachers held and how they taught pronunciation in a Vietnamese setting. Questionnaires and classroom observations were utilized to collect data in this study. The results showed that the majority of teachers valued the importance of pronunciation in English teaching and pronunciation was integrated into their English classes with a particular focus on intelligibility. In another study, Quoc et al. (2021) explored how English pronunciation was taught at an English center and what beliefs the teachers held about their classroom practices regarding purposes, time allocation and techniques. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews and classroom observations. The key findings showed the teachers'

strong beliefs about the necessity of time contribution, corrective feedback, and authentic materials in pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms.

In a tertiary setting, Nguyen and Newton (2020) looked into six EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation teaching at a public university. Classroom observations and interviews were used to collect data. The research showed a discrepancy between what the teachers said and what they actually did in their English classes. According to this useful insight into the interplay between teachers' beliefs and their pronunciation teaching practices, the study further showed that the teachers were not sufficiently trained and so needed more professional learning opportunities to develop their expertise in pronunciation teaching.

Taken together, research has shown that even though English pronunciation instruction was highly evaluated in the English teaching and learning, it was still limited at university level education in Vietnam. Thus, there is a need for gaining more nuanced understanding about Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding pronunciation instruction to contribute to the literature.

## **2.6 Research aim and questions**

The overall aim of this study is to look into EFL teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding pronunciation instruction in some tertiary EFL educational institutions in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. This study was designed to answer the two following research questions:

- 1) What cognitions do Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers hold about pronunciation instruction?
- 2) To what extent do the teachers' cognitions interplay with their actual classroom practices?

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research design and instruments**

The present study adopted qualitative research in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' cognitions that underpinned their decision-making in teaching pronunciation within their real-life teaching situations. Data were gathered through a questionnaire and classroom observations.

Regarding *the questionnaire*, it was utilized to survey teacher participants' cognitions about pronunciation instruction and reported pronunciation teaching practices in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire was designed with three sections. The first section primarily focuses on the teacher participants' personal information.

The second section examining teachers' cognitions about pronunciation instruction employs a 5-point-Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In particular, it includes three clusters with 18 items: The importance of pronunciation instruction (7 items); Pronunciation goals and features (5 items) and Pronunciation teaching methodology (6 items). These clusters and items were adapted

from key studies reviewed in the literature including Darcy (2018); Foote et al. (2012); Nguyen and Bui (2021).

Lastly, the third section investigating teachers' pronunciation instruction practices using a 5-point-Likert scale (i.e, 1=never, 2=occasionally 3=sometimes, 4=often and 5=always) comprises three clusters (14 items), namely controlled activities (6 items); guided activities (4 items) and free activities (4 items). These clusters were adapted from the framework proposed by Baker (2014). Remarkably, to ensure the reliability of quantitative data, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese, the teacher participants' first language, for helping facilitate their comprehension of the questionnaire items.

Turning now to *classroom observations*, in order to gain 'live' accounts from 'live' settings (Cohen et al., 2007), classroom observation was considered a useful technique for recording what is happening in natural settings (Yin, 2014). In this research, non-participant classroom observations were conducted (i.e., each teacher participant's pronunciation instruction was observed while their classes were recorded).

### 3.2 Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select participants who were available and willing to participate in this study (Creswell, 2013). The subject of the research involves 76 Vietnamese EFL tertiary teachers at 4 public universities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. After completing the questionnaire, the teacher participants were asked for their voluntary agreement about observing their pronunciation teaching practices in the next session. Three teachers (one male and two females) from 2 universities finally agreed to become the official participants in the observation session. Regarding the ethical considerations, it clearly stated that data was collected for the research purpose only. Besides, the teacher participants did not need to show their names in the questionnaire and those who related to the observation session were given the pseudonyms Mi, Hang and Huy. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic information of participants in this current research.

**Table 1:** Demographic information of teacher participants

Variables	Sub-variables	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	23	30.3%
	Female	53	69.7%
Degree	BA	15	19.7%
	MA	60	78.9%
	PhD	1	1.3%
Major	Applied Linguistics	4	3.5%
	Education	4	3.5%
	English	15	13.0%
	English Education	4	3.5%
	International Relations	1	0.9%
	TESOL	48	41.7%
Teaching experience	Under 5 years	15	19.7%

	5 - 10 years	23	30.3%
	10 - 15 years	16	21.1%
	15 - 20 years	10	13.2%
	Over 20 years	12	15.8%

**Note:** N = 76 (number of participants)

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was first piloted to check its reliability with 23 teachers whereas the interview questions were piloted to examine the content validity by two teachers. All the teachers involving the piloting were Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers from two universities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, who did not take part in the main study. The Google Form-based questionnaire was delivered to the teachers via Zalo and email. Then data were collected to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the result of the piloting with Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.949$  (N=23), it showed that the reliability of the questionnaire was significant in this study. After the pilot stage, the questionnaire was revised and then delivered to the official teachers participating in this present study through an internet-based instrument (Google Form). Meanwhile, classroom observations were video-taped via Google Meet and Microsoft Teams platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the quantitative data analysis, all data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS, version 25. First, a Scale test was run to check the reliability of the questionnaires. The result showed that the reliability coefficient of the questionnaires was confirmed with Cronbach's  $\alpha=.870$  (N=76), as indicated at a high level ( $\alpha >.70$ ) according to Pallant (2016). It indicated that the questionnaire was reliable to be used for the official administration of data collection. In addition, the Descriptive Statistic test and One-Way ANOVA test were computed to compare mean scores with a specific test value based on the scale adapted from Oxford's (1990) Key to understanding the averages (see Table 2). These tests were employed to examine teachers' cognitions and their practices regarding pronunciation instruction.

**Table 2:** Key to understanding the averages (Oxford, 1990)

Levels	Range
Very high	4.5 – 5.0
High	3.5 – 4.4
Moderate	2.5 – 3.4
Low	1.5 – 2.4
Very low	1.0 – 1.4

In the qualitative data analysis, data gathered from classroom observations (12 videos) concentrated on key teaching categories such as the teachers' use of a particular pronunciation teaching activity, explanation of a phonological feature, giving corrective feedback or raising students' awareness of pronunciation errors. For the purpose of coding the teachers' pronunciation teaching episodes, the four-category scheme in a

previous study by Foote et al. (2016) was adopted to identify and code parts of each lesson where pronunciation instruction was present. These included: (1) Planning: pre-planned versus reactive; (2) Target: segmental versus suprasegmental; (3) Specific form (sound contrast); and (4) Impact: involving individual students versus the whole class.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Teachers' cognitions about pronunciation instruction

Concerning the answer to the first research question - the teacher participants' cognitions about pronunciation instruction in their EFL classes, data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed. First, a Descriptive Statistic test was administered to examine the mean scores of each cluster in the teachers' cognitions. The research results of the test were presented in the following tables.

**Table 3:** The importance of pronunciation instruction

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Pronunciation is an important skill in the process of English teaching and learning	76	3.00	5.00	4.55	0.55
Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English listening and speaking skills	76	3.00	5.00	4.63	0.54
Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English reading skills	76	1.00	5.00	2.67	1.18
Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English writing skills	76	1.00	5.00	2.43	1.20
Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English grammar	76	1.00	5.00	2.51	1.17
Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English vocabulary	76	1.00	5.00	4.63	0.78

**Note:** N = number of participants.

As shown in Table 3, among the six categories, the mean scores of *“Pronunciation is an important skill in the process of English teaching and learning”*; *“Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English listening and speaking skills”* and *“Pronunciation instruction is an important part of the process of teaching English vocabulary”* were similarly valued at very high levels (at 4.55, 4.63 and 4.63 respectively) whilst the mean scores of the other categories were ranked moderate and low levels (at 2.67, 2.51 and 2.43). In other words, the importance of pronunciation instruction was significantly evaluated in the process of English teaching and learning and it was focused on teaching *English vocabulary, listening and speaking skills* more than other skills in the EFL classrooms.

**Table 4:** Pronunciation goals and features

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Pronunciation is the most difficult skill in the process of English teaching and learning	76	2.00	5.00	3.64	0.98
Pronunciation goal is to help learners attain native-like accents	76	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.23
Pronunciation goal is to help learners attain intelligible and/or comprehensible pronunciation for communicative purposes	76	3.00	5.00	4.45	0.55
In pronunciation instruction, segmental features should be focused	76	2.00	5.00	4.29	0.63
In pronunciation instruction, suprasegmental features should be focused	76	3.00	5.00	4.28	0.58

**Note:** N = number of participants.

Looking at Table 4, the remarkable difference between the two mean scores of the goals in pronunciation instruction was shown. Specifically, the mean score of “*Pronunciation goal is to help learners attain intelligible and/or comprehensible pronunciation for communicative purposes*” (M=4.45) was much higher than that of “*Pronunciation goal is to help learners to attain native-like accents*” (M=2.64). Besides, two features of pronunciation instruction (*segmentals* and *suprasegmentals*) are similarly evaluated at M=4.29 and M=4.28 respectively (at high levels). Therefore, the teachers emphasized teaching both segmental and suprasegmental features to assist their students in attaining intelligible and/or comprehensible pronunciation in oral communication.

**Table 5:** Pronunciation teaching methodology

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Pronunciation is best learned through more practice than the explanation of rules or theoretical knowledge	76	1.00	5.00	3.76	1.06
Pronunciation is best learned through “Bottom-up” technique	76	1.00	5.00	3.64	0.84
Pronunciation is best learned through “Top-down” technique	76	2.00	5.00	3.38	0.94
Pronunciation is best learned through “Explicit pronunciation instruction”	76	1.00	5.00	3.79	0.77
Pronunciation is best learned through corrective feedback	76	2.00	5.00	3.76	0.92
Pronunciation is best learned through communicative instruction	76	2.00	5.00	4.05	0.76

**Note:** N = number of participants.

As detailed in Table 5, the mean score of “*Pronunciation is best learned through more practice than the explanation of rules or theoretical knowledge*” was evaluated at a high level (M=3.76). In addition, the mean scores of pronunciation techniques such as “*bottom-up technique*”; “*explicit pronunciation instruction*”; “*corrective feedback*” and “*communicative instruction*” in

EFL classes were ranked high levels ( $M > 3.5$ ) while “*top-down technique*” was perceived at a moderate-level mean score ( $M = 3.38$ ). Given that the teacher participants focused on teaching pronunciation through practice and highlighted the value of communicative pronunciation instruction.

In brief, according to the data analysis from the questionnaire, pronunciation was significantly evaluated in the process of English teaching and learning in EFL classes. In addition, the teacher mainly focused on teaching pronunciation to help their students attain intelligible and/or comprehensible pronunciation for communicative purposes.

#### 4.2 Teachers' reports on pronunciation instruction practices in EFL classes

This section reports in what ways the teachers taught pronunciation in their EFL classes. First, from the questionnaire data, a One-Way ANOVA was executed to compare the mean scores of three types of activities, namely *controlled activities*, *guided activities* and *free activities* that the teachers frequently used in their EFL classrooms, as presented in the following tables.

**Table 6:** Three types of activities for PI in EFL classes

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Controlled activities	76	3.17	5.00	4.04	0.45
Guided activities	76	2.00	5.00	3.81	0.70
Free activities	76	1.00	5.00	3.30	1.12

**Note:** N = number of participants.

Table 6 indicated that the mean scores of *controlled activities* and *guided activities* were ranked a high level whereas that of *free activities* was perceived at a moderate level. Particularly, the mean score of *controlled activities* ( $M = 4.04$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ) is higher than the mean scores of the two other activities: *guided activities* ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ) and *free activities* ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = 1.12$ ).

**Table 7:** One-Way ANOVA Result

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	21.955	2	10.978	16.950	.000
Within groups	145.721	225	.648		
Total	167.677	227			

In Table 7, a One-Way between-subjects ANOVA was run to compare the effects of three groups (*controlled activities*, *guided activities* and *free activities*), which the teachers frequently used for pronunciation instruction practices. It can be seen that there was a significant impact on these three groups with an acceptable p-value ( $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ).

**Table 8:** Multiple comparisons of three activities

Tukey HSD						
(I) Total activities	(J) Total activities	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Controlled activities	Guided activities	.22478	.13055	.199	-.0832	.5328
	Free activities	.74123*	.13055	.000	.4332	1.0492
Guided activities	Controlled activities	-.22478	.13055	.199	-.5328	.0832
	Free activities	.51645*	.13055	.000	.2084	.8245
Free activities	Controlled activities	-.74123*	.13055	.000	-1.0492	-.4332
	Guided activities	-.51645*	.13055	.000	-.8245	-.2084

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As can be seen in Tables 6 and 8, Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score of *controlled activities* (M=4.04; SD=0.45) was significantly higher than the mean score of *free activities* (M=3.30; SD=1.12) with an acceptable p-value (Sig.=0.000<0.05). Similarly, it showed a remarkable difference between the mean scores of *guided activities* (M=3.81; SD=0.70) and *free activities* (M=3.30; SD=1.12) with an acceptable p-value (Sig.=0.000<0.05). In contrast, the mean score of *controlled activities* did not considerably differ from that of *guided activities* (Sig.= 0.199>0.05). In other words, the teacher participants employed *controlled* and *guided activities* more frequently than *free activities* to teach pronunciation in their English classes.

For the analysis of individual items, a Descriptive Statistic test was computed to examine the mean scores of 14 items in three categories, as illustrated in Table 9 below.

**Table 9:** Pronunciation instruction practices in EFL classes

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<b>1. Controlled activities</b>					
Explanation and examples	76	2.00	5.00	4.07	0.62
Practice and production	76	3.00	5.00	4.14	0.56
Checking	76	3.00	5.00	4.24	0.65
Repetition drill	76	2.00	5.00	3.99	0.72
Audio identification	76	2.00	5.00	3.99	0.70
Video identification	76	1.00	5.00	3.80	0.86
<b>2. Guided activities</b>					
Question-answer referential	76	2.00	5.00	3.83	0.72
Production-student feedback practice	76	1.00	5.00	3.76	0.91
Production-audio recognition	76	1.00	5.00	3.71	0.89
Mutual exchange	76	1.00	5.00	3.95	0.83
<b>3. Free activities</b>					
Game	76	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.22

Drama	76	1.00	5.00	3.04	1.34
Discussion	76	1.00	5.00	3.32	1.16
Presentation	76	1.00	5.00	3.45	1.16

**Note:** N = number of participants.

As illustrated in Table 9, overview, all of the techniques used in the *controlled* and *guided activities* were highly perceived ( $M > 3.5$ ) whereas those for *free activities* were evaluated at a moderate level ( $M < 3.5$ ). In addition, the most common technique utilized in *controlled activities* were “*explanation and examples*”, “*practice and production*” and “*checking*” at  $M = 4.07$ ,  $4.14$  and  $4.24$  respectively. In short, it was reported that *controlled* and *guided activities* were commonly used in the teacher participants’ English classrooms. Remarkably, the teachers significantly focused on teaching pronunciation by giving much corrective feedback on their students’ pronunciation errors.

Second, the observational data was comprised and analyzed in two parts. The first one illustrated a general picture of the lesson structure and how the lessons progressed. The second part reported the analysis of specific instances of pronunciation instruction that were carried out by each of the teachers in intact classes and why they gave for their pronunciation instruction decisions. Particularly, the analysis of the observational data included identifying and categorizing all classroom events that involved pronunciation instruction such as the teachers’ use of a particular pronunciation teaching activity, explanation of a phonological feature and reaction to a student’s pronunciation mistakes. However, some complicated pronunciation points and communicative practices were often neglected in the observed classes. In terms of lesson structure, the data showed that the teachers all shared common ways of conducting their lessons when they typically followed the order of sections in the textbooks. They mainly focused on the content in the textbooks in implementing pronunciation and their pronunciation instruction in the English classes was frequently used in the *Presentation* and *Practice* stages with using much corrective feedback coded as recasts. Specifically, the teachers gave model pronunciation and then asked their students to listen and repeat. The following pronunciation instruction episodes illustrate this.

**Episode 1:** In the classroom observation with Teacher Mi, the sound /f/ was presented in the teacher’s lesson plan. It was observed that the students’ pronunciation mistakes were immediately corrected by the teacher. She also corrected the wrong sounds that the students learned before in their speaking performances.

T: Ok. How to pronounce these words [cough – fashion – physics]

T: Now, listen. Number 1: cough [play the recording – 3 times].

T: Ok. Number 2: fashion [play the recording – 8 times].

T: And now. Number 3: physics [play the recording – 7 times].

T: Now. Listen: cough – fashion – physics [the teacher read again three words – 1 time]

T: Now you practice these words by yourself.

[After a minute, the teacher invited student 1 to read aloud the given words]

S1: cough – fashion – physics

T: Ok. That's right.

*[The teacher invited student 2]*

S2: cough – fashion – physics

*[The teacher emphasized the sound 'f' in the word "physics" /'fɪzɪks/]*

T: Ok. That's right. And one more person.

*[The teacher invited student 3]*

S3: cough – fashion – physics

*[The teacher corrected the pronunciation of the student 3: /əʊ/ -> /ʊ/ in "cough"; /ei/ -> /æ/ in "fashion"; /s/ -> /z/ in "physics"]*

T: Ok. Thank you.

Regarding the pronunciation teaching activities employed in the classes, the teacher participants helped their students practice pronunciation through reading the given words aloud and giving corrective feedback on students' pronunciation errors. Tongue twisters were especially prominent in their teaching practices, as shown in the following scenarios.

**Episode 2:** Teacher Hang used tongue twisters to help her students practice the sound /f/. She first showed a paragraph on the screen.

*A flea and a fly flew up in a flue*

*Said the fly, "let us flee!"*

*"Let us fly!" said the flea.*

*So, they flew through a flaw in the flue.*

*Of all the felt I ever felt, I never felt a piece of felt which felt as fine as that felt felt, when first I felt that felt hat's felt*

After that, she read the paragraph as a sample, then asked some students to read the paragraph and gave corrective feedback on the students' pronunciation errors.

**Episode 3:** In pronunciation teaching practices, Teacher Huy also used tongue twisters to help the students practice pronunciation. He first showed five sentences with /ð/ and /θ/ sounds to practice.

*They're both thirsty on Thursday.*

*I think his birthday is on the fourth Thursday of the month.*

*The weather is better in the north these days.*

*This thing is worth one thousand and thirteen pounds.*

*Their mother had healthy teeth then.*

After that, Teacher Huy played a recording for listening to the native speaker's voice, he spoke each sentence again as a sample, then asked some students to read the sentences again and gave feedback.

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1 Teachers' cognitions about pronunciation instruction

The first research question was designed to explore the teachers' cognitions towards pronunciation instruction, with a focus on three dimensions, including *the importance of pronunciation instruction*, *pronunciation goals and features* and *pronunciation teaching methodology*. As previously presented, the significance of pronunciation teaching was highly evaluated with a focus on an intelligible pronunciation goal by the teacher participants. These findings reinforce the research reports by Bai and Yuan (2019); Darcy (2018); Tran and Nguyen (2020) emphasizing that the majority of teachers highlighted the importance of pronunciation in English language teaching focused on intelligibility because pronunciation instruction helps enhance the development of English oral communication skills.

In terms of pronunciation features, the teachers believed that teaching pronunciation involved a strong focus on both segmentals and suprasegmentals. In contrast, the research conducted by Couper (2017) reported that the teacher participants often taught segmental sounds rather than suprasegmental features in their English classes due to the lack of initial training and low confidence to teach pronunciation. In a similar vein, it was believed that segmental features were more important than suprasegmental features. Also, the teachers found it easy to teach vowels and consonants by using illustrations and explanations with pictures (Nguyen & Newton, 2020). However, the current findings gained essential support from the literature as leading scholars in the field consistently argue that in pronunciation instruction both segmental and suprasegmental features should be adequately implemented in EFL classrooms (Buss, 2016a; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Saito & Lyster, 2012).

Another key finding in relation to pronunciation teaching methodology was perceived that the teachers highlighted the mentioned pronunciation approaches and applied them flexibly in their English classes. Remarkably, pronunciation should be taught communicatively through real-life situations. In addition, it was found that the priority in pronunciation instruction was to help students achieve intelligible pronunciation for successful communication (Nguyen & Bui, 2021; Nguyen & Newton, 2020). Moreover, communicative pronunciation teaching was the most suitable for improving students' pronunciation as well as listening and speaking skills since they could practice pronunciation together with listening and speaking skills through communication situations (Nguyen et al., 2021). In this sense, these research reports were aligned with the results shown in the present study.

### 5.2 Teachers' actual practices regarding pronunciation instruction

In general, the research results indicated that the controlled techniques were clearly dominant in English classes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *explanation and examples*, *practice and productions* and *checking* were an integral part of the teachers' pronunciation instruction

in the classes. It was reported that they first spent time explaining English pronunciation features. After that, conducting pronunciation teaching with the students included some given practice and exercises such as *listen-and-repeat activities*, *listening discrimination*, *question-answer referential*, *repetition drills* and *tongue twisters*. Finally, checking the students' work and giving *corrective feedback* were focused on their pronunciation errors. This finding appears to show equivalence with the previous result reported by Baker (2014). Together, this body of research findings reconfirms that *controlled* and *guided activities* were the more frequent techniques the teachers utilized in teaching pronunciation than *free activities*.

In addition, the research by Buss (2016a) indicated that the teacher participants' pronunciation teaching practices tended to be traditional (i.e., focused mainly on *isolated sounds*, *problematic sound correction* and *repetition activities*). Similarly, according to the study by Couper (2021), different instructional activities were mainly used in the classrooms such as *phonetic training*, *repetition drills*, *explicit teaching activities* and *listening discrimination*. Therefore, there was an alignment between the current research and some previous studies in terms of the activities used in pronunciation instruction.

### **5.3 The interplay between the teachers' cognitions and their actual classroom practices**

To answer the second research question, the analysis of the questionnaire data together with observable data was examined. In particular, the research findings have shown that pronunciation was seen as an indispensable role in the process of English teaching and learning by the participants. With regard to goals in pronunciation instruction, *intelligibility and/or comprehensibility* were valued as the ultimate goal of English pronunciation instruction. Furthermore, teaching English pronunciation should be emphasized in *communicative instruction* because students' pronunciation as well as listening and speaking skills can simultaneously improve through a wide range of communication tasks. Regarding instructional activities for pronunciation teaching in the EFL classes, it was reported that *controlled* and *guided techniques* were often employed by the teacher participants. Sometimes, they foster student interaction by giving some *free activities* such as games, discussions and presentations. Therefore, it could be obtained that pronunciation instructional methods were flexibly used to reach the goals of teaching pronunciation.

Nonetheless, according to the observable data, it showed that the amount of time the teachers used for pronunciation instruction practices was approximately 20 to 30 minutes for each meeting. The main approach to pronunciation instruction across all the three teachers consisted of *explaining pronunciation features*, *listen-and-repeat activities* and giving much *corrective feedback* in response to individual students' pronunciation errors. In addition, in the present study, the teachers significantly focused on *Presentation* and *Practice* stages in their pronunciation instruction because it was observed that *communicative practices* were not shown in all videoed lessons even though the value of communicative pronunciation instruction was previously highlighted. Therefore, these key findings indicated that the teachers' stated cognitions towards pronunciation

teaching and its importance in English language teaching and learning did not match their actual classroom practices. For instance, in the excerpts, the teachers only taught individual sounds (*segmentals*) rather than *suprasegmental features* so that *communicative pronunciation practices* were mostly neglected in their EFL classes. Remarkably, that was kept separate from the regular English classes and did not incorporate *communicative opportunities* using authentic language use relevant to students' daily lives.

## 6. Implications

First, the study has found that all the teacher participants had limited their pronunciation instruction. Particularly, it was observed that they mainly focused on teaching segmentals rather than suprasegmental features that contradicts the pronunciation goal perceived to help learners attain intelligible and/or comprehensible pronunciation for communicative purposes. Therefore, understanding teachers' pronunciation teaching practices and their stated cognitions help EFL teachers be well aware of their current English language teaching and think of the need for teacher training programs about pronunciation instruction to improve their professional development.

Secondly, given that pronunciation is a crucial component of communicative competence, EFL teachers need to consider integrating communicative pronunciation instruction into their English classes so that students can have opportunities to practice pronunciation and achieve the goal of becoming effective communicators in English. In addition, teachers should encourage students' motivation by balancing instructional techniques, namely controlled activities, guided activities and free activities in their English classrooms.

Lastly, pronunciation teaching was sometimes neglected in the classes; thus, factors influencing pronunciation instruction should be explored to address this issue. Besides, awareness of the importance of pronunciation instruction should be raised by both teachers and students because students' improved pronunciation may help foster their confidence in learning English, especially in listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, successful English communication with sufficient language knowledge can bring students more career prospects after graduation in the era of digital technology and globalization. Hence, the study findings provide educational leaders with helpful information in their decision-making regarding educational changes by informing EFL curriculum design, selection of teaching materials, and future EFL teacher training in Vietnam about pronunciation pedagogy.

## 7. Conclusion

This study addressed the gaps to contribute to the literature by gaining more nuanced understanding about pronunciation teaching which was still limited at university level education in Vietnam. Specifically, useful insights into teachers' cognitions and pronunciation teaching practices can be applicable to the work of many EFL teachers in

all tertiary institutions nationwide. Remarkably, teaching pronunciation should adequately focus on both segmental and suprasegmental features for communicative interaction. As reported, the teachers' stated cognitions regarding pronunciation instruction seemed not to match their actual classroom practices. Therefore, further studies should investigate some factors influencing pronunciation instruction and the need for teacher professional development.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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