Pronunciation Teaching in Tertiary EFL Classes: Vietnamese Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

Recent research in English as a second language (ESL) contexts has shown pronunciation teaching to be undervalued and often overlooked both in published textbooks and teachers' classroom practice, despite growing research evidence for the efficacy of appropriately structured pronunciation teaching. The current study extends research on this topic into an English as a foreign language (EFL) context where it has hitherto been underexamined, namely tertiary EFL in Vietnam. The study investigates the beliefs and pronunciation teaching practices of six EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university. Data includes non-participant observations and video-recordings of twelve 45-minute EFL lessons taught by these teachers. Classroom observations were followed-up by individual interviews involving stimulated recall and general questions about beliefs and perspectives concerning pronunciation teaching. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English for content-based analysis. The results show that the teachers' pronunciation teaching was typically unplanned and reactive, involving corrective feedback through recasts and/or prompts in response to learners' pronunciation errors of segmental features. The study also shows that the teachers lacked initial training and professional learning opportunities in pronunciation pedagogy and that contextual factors appeared to constrain their pronunciation teaching.

Keywords: *Pronunciation; Vietnamese EFL; teaching practice; teacher beliefs; pronunciation pedagogy.*

An emerging strand of research on second language (L2) pronunciation teaching seeks to describe and understand the ways and extent to which teachers in specific contexts address pronunciation, and the factors that influence their classroom practices. Most such studies have been carried out in ESL contexts such as the USA (Darcy, Ewert, & Lidster, 2011), Australia (Burns, 2006; Macdonald, 2002; Yates, 2001) and Canada (Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, & Urzúa, 2016). Much less research has been conducted in EFL contexts, and particularly in Asian countries. The research that does exist is somewhat scattered across time and space, for example, in China (Chen, 2016) and Malaysia (Wahid & Sulong, 2013).

In recent years, research has also focused on how teachers' beliefs influence their approach to pronunciation teaching. Given that teachers are active decision-makers in the language classroom (Borg, 2015), this research has the potential to provide valuable insights into how teachers mediate pronunciation learning. However, no published studies of which we are aware have investigated teachers' beliefs and practices of English pronunciation teaching in Vietnam. The fact that over 22 million learners are currently studying English in primary and secondary schools, and at universities throughout the country, and that Vietnamese EFL learners face unique challenges in mastering English pronunciation (Avery & Ehrlich, 2013) provides a compelling rationale to investigate pronunciation teaching in this context. This study describes the pronunciation teaching practices of six teachers in the EFL programme at a Vietnamese university and the beliefs they hold about pronunciation teaching.

Literature Review

Pronunciation is an important component of successful oral communication (Jones, 2018; Rogerson-Revell, 2011) and language learners usually recognize it as a priority (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Seyedabadi, Fatemi, & Pishghadam, 2015). However, research has shown pronunciation teaching to be often reactive and unplanned, comprised largely of on-the-spot error correction. For instance, Foote et al.'s (2011) survey of ESL programmes across Canada showed that most of the instructors reported mainly correcting learners' pronunciation errors through repetition. In a subsequent study, Foote et al. (2016) found that "most pronunciation teaching episodes were not incorporated into lesson plans, but instead involved various kinds of corrective feedback in response to individual student errors" (p.181). Similarly, Murphy (2011) found that over 90% of the 36 teacher participants in four private schools in the Dublin area of Ireland reported using listen-and-repeat activities or giving corrective feedback when learners read aloud rather than spending class time teaching pronunciation explicitly. Within an Asian context, Wahid and Sulong (2013) found that EFL teachers at a Malaysian university avoided teaching pronunciation explicitly; they instead corrected students' pronunciation errors during oral performance. In these cases, at least, while teachers did address pronunciation in their classes, their approach was usually limited to error correction or listen-and-repeat activities.

There has been limited research on the topic of teacher cognition and pronunciation teaching, although recent studies have begun to address this gap by investigating teachers' beliefs about the pronunciation features they usually teach, the techniques they use, and their confidence, initial training, and professional learning (PL) needs (Baker, 2014; Couper, 2016, 2017). Baker

(2014) explored knowledge of pronunciation-oriented techniques of five ESL teachers in a North American intensive English programme. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews with the teachers, and questionnaires with the students. Results showed that the teachers were most familiar with controlled pronunciation teaching techniques and used these predominantly in all the observed classes. They believed that perception training helps improve learners' comprehensibility and that kinesthetic/tactile practice is integral to pronunciation improvement. The teachers, who relied heavily on textbooks, perceived pronunciation teaching to be rather boring.

Burri, Baker, and Chen (2017) compared the development in cognition of five experienced and ten inexperienced teachers during a postgraduate course on pronunciation pedagogy at an Australian university. They found that by the end of the course the experienced teachers had made greater gains in their beliefs and knowledge about pronunciation pedagogy, and they also reported being more confident to teach pronunciation. On the basis of their findings, the authors argue that pronunciation needs to be treated as a necessary component of L2 teacher education programmes. However, given the differential impact of teacher education in this study, teacher educators need to be sensitive to the needs of student teachers with different levels of background knowledge and experience.

In his study investigating how 19 ESL teachers in New Zealand perceived pronunciation teaching, Couper (2017) used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The findings showed that the teachers lacked training and confidence in teaching pronunciation and that there were clear gaps in their knowledge of phonetics, phonology and pronunciation pedagogy. However, they were keen to have more opportunities for professional development and they all viewed intelligible pronunciation and effective communication as the appropriate goal of instruction. While the teachers believed it is necessary to teach suprasegmentals, they reported lacking knowledge of these features and of how to teach them. Consequently, they most often focused on segmentals. Couper concluded that these knowledge gaps explain the teachers' lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation and why they avoided it. Similarly, research by Bai and Yuan (2019) found that EFL teachers in Hong Kong find it difficult to teach pronunciation in their English classes, in part, at least, because they lack knowledge of phonology and training in pronunciation teaching.

Taken together, these studies show a consistent pattern of a rather ad hoc approach to pronunciation teaching in many classrooms. This contrasts with a growing body of research findings for the efficacy of deliberate pronunciation teaching in both segmental and suprasegmental features (Adams-Goertel, 2013; Counselman, 2015; Pardede, 2018; Saito, 2011). This line of research also shows that teachers often lack training and professional development opportunities in pronunciation teaching and have low levels of confidence in this area of pedagogy. The current study seeks to extend research on this topic to the Vietnamese EFL context by investigating how EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university teach pronunciation and the beliefs they hold about their pronunciation teaching.

Method

The study adopts a case study approach which allows for a contemporary phenomenon to be examined within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). The study is descriptive in its orientation, focusing on EFL teachers' beliefs and pronunciation teaching practices. It addresses two research questions:

1. How do EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university teach pronunciation in their English classes?

2. What beliefs do the teachers hold about their pronunciation teaching?

Research Setting and Participants

This research involved a cohort of six Vietnamese EFL teachers at a public university in Vietnam who volunteered to participate in the study. The participants included one male and five female teachers, aged from 29 to 52. All had an MA degree in TESOL or Applied Linguistics and had been teaching at the university from six to 23 years. They were given the pseudonyms 1A, 2B, 3C, 4D, 5E, and 6F for the purpose of this research.

At the time that the research was conducted, the EFL programme provided four English courses for students who majored in different areas of economics. Each course lasted 12 weeks with one weekly class meeting lasting for three hours, and consisted of four study packages. Each study package included 12 lessons and was designed with two lessons each for listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. In assessment, the students' final results were made up of a mid-term score (40%) and an end-of-term score (60%). The former might take the form of an oral or a written test depending on individual teacher preferences. No specific criteria were officially assigned to pronunciation. The end-of-term score was from a written exam which mainly tested students' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, reading and listening comprehension, and writing. As such, pronunciation played no role in either assessment.

Data Collection

Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations (twelve 45-minute lessons, two each for the six teachers) and six individual interviews (approximately 30 minutes each). Classroom observations were audio-video recorded, with author 1 also taking unstructured field notes. During a two-lesson period, each of the teachers covered two to three sections in each unit of the textbook, which generally included vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading or grammar, but not writing. The day after being observed, each teacher was interviewed on their pedagogic decision-making in relation to pronunciation teaching, and their account of the contextual factors which facilitated or constrained their classroom practice. The interviews were conducted in two parts. The first was semi-structured and focused on the teachers' general practices and beliefs. The second took the form of a Stimulated Recall (SR) interview. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese by author 1 and took place in a private teacher lounge at the university. To investigate the teachers' general practices and beliefs, each

teacher was asked if they teach pronunciation explicitly, how often they teach it, what teaching steps they follow, how much time they spend, and what teaching materials they use. The teachers were also asked to describe the pronunciation goals they set for their students, their focus of instruction, and their initial training and PL experience in pronunciation pedagogy.

During the SR session, each teacher watched recordings of two selected excerpts of their previous lessons in which pronunciation was a focus and was asked to recall what they were thinking at the time. After that, they were asked if they used any other technique to teach pronunciation beside those in the excerpts, and were then encouraged to talk about the reasons for their teaching decisions. These two excerpts were selected by author 1 based on observation field notes, with one showing the teacher's use of recasts and the other of prompts to address pronunciation. The interviews were transcribed in full and sent back to the teachers for confirmation, clarification, and/or modification prior to analysis. This member-checking procedure resulted in some minor changes to wording but not to the substance of their answers. In total, the data included nine hours of classroom observations followed by three hours of individual interviews with the teachers. The combination of both wide ranging and closely focused interview data and observation data produced a rich, triangulated data set.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis of the observation data involved identifying and categorising all classroom events that included pronunciation teaching such as the teachers' reaction to the students' pronunciation errors, explanation of a phonological feature, or use of a particular pronunciation teaching activity. A four-category scheme developed by Foote et al. (2016) was adopted for data analysis and covered: (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. Based on classroom-based research by Saito (2011), all instances of the teachers giving corrective feedback to students' pronunciation errors were further coded as recasts (giving model pronunciations with or without IPA transcriptions) or prompts (encouraging self-correction by giving meta-linguistic clues). A Vietnamese EFL teacher was trained to code a sample of pronunciation teaching episodes from the lessons. A comparison of coding by the two coders showed an agreement percentage of over 98%. The time spent on different types of practice for each teacher and for all the teachers was also calculated.

The study adopted a content-based approach to analysing the interview data. This involved an iterative, cyclical and inductive process of identifying and refining themes and categories in the data set (Duff, 2008). Through transcribing and then reading the transcripts, initial themes and categories emerged, and were refined through re-reading and refining the thematic categories.

Findings

Findings will now be reported for each of the two research questions.

How do the teachers at a Vietnamese university teach pronunciation in their English classes?

This section first reports on the teachers' self-reported pronunciation teaching practices (PTP) and then on those identified in the observed lessons. In the interviews, the teachers were asked to describe (1) how often they taught pronunciation explicitly, (2) how much time they spent, (3) how they went about teaching it, and (4) the materials they reported using. Their responses are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The teachers' self-reported PTP

Teacher & frequency	Time spent	Teaching procedures	Materials used
1A Sometimes	about 15 minutes	– Listening discrimination – Explaining places of articulation – Listen and repeat activities – Practice (paragraph reading)	Pronunciation in Use
2B Seldom	15 – 20 minutes	– Listening discrimination – Explaining places of articulation – Listen and repeat activities	Ship or Sheep
3C Never	not applicable	not applicable	not applicable
4D Seldom	about 10 minutes	– Listening discrimination – Explaining places of articulation – Listen and repeat activities	– Tree or Three – Sounds English
5E Seldom	about 20 minutes	– Listening discrimination – Explaining places of articulation – Listen and repeat activities – Practice (minimal pairs)	– Ship or Sheep – Elements of Pronunciation
6F Sometimes	10 – 15 minutes	– Listening discrimination – Explaining places of articulation – Listen and repeat activities – Practice (minimal pairs)	– *Tactics for Listening* – *Vocabulary Games and Activities*

With respect to questions 1 and 2, Teachers 1A and 6F reported sometimes teaching pronunciation explicitly, 2B, 4D and 5E seldom, and Teacher 3C never. Teachers 1A, 2B, 4D, 5E, and 6F elaborated by saying that they only teach pronunciation explicitly when class time allows and/or in response to a common error amongst learners. They also estimated spending between 10 and 20 minutes on pronunciation in an average ninety-minute period.

With respect to question 3, the five teachers reported following three similar steps when teaching pronunciation explicitly: (1) Present the pronunciation of the target sound(s) at word level through listening and discrimination activities; (2) Explain the place of articulation; and (3) Ask students to listen to and repeat words which included the target sound(s). Three of the teachers said they added a further practice stage, with two of them using minimal pair practice, and one conducting paragraph reading with a focus on the words containing the target sounds. In terms of teaching materials, four of the teachers reported drawing their teaching activities from pronunciation textbooks and one used pronunciation practice activities in general ESL/EFL texts.

Turning to the observational data, it shows that the textbook units taught in the twelve 45-minute lessons that were observed included reading, listening and speaking skills practice, and explicit instruction on grammar and vocabulary. For each skill, all six teachers followed a Presentation–Practice–Production approach (Ellis, 2009) to lesson design which involved: presenting a language structure; practicing the structure; and providing opportunities for learners to produce the structure in freer communication. In contrast to the planned and systematic approach the teachers took to teach other skills such as grammar or reading, for pronunciation, they only ever adopted a reactive focus-on-form approach (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004) through recasting errors and/or prompting learners to correct their errors. In contrast to grammar and vocabulary teaching, there was no planned syllabus for teaching pronunciation. Details of the observed classroom practices of each of the six teachers are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. The teachers' observed PTP

Teacher	Pronunciation teaching activities			Total time used per 90 minutes
	Recasts with IPA transcriptions	*Recasts without IPA transcriptions*	*Prompts*	
1A	—	✓	✓	6'45"
2B	—	✓	✓	4'27"
3C	—	✓	✓	1'46"
4D	—	✓	✓	4'45"
5E	✓	✓	✓	6'52"
6F	✓	✓	✓	5'35"

(Note: The tick (Π) indicates that the teachers took this action and the dash (–) that they did not)

Table 2 shows that the pronunciation teaching activities adopted by the six teachers were restricted to three strategies: (1) recasting with IPA transcriptions; (2) recasting without IPA transcriptions; and (3) prompting. Of these, recasting without IPA transcriptions and prompting were employed by all the teachers. In recasting, the teachers reformulated the pronunciation of the words and asked the students to repeat after them. Recasting with IPA transcriptions written on the board was only used by two teachers. In prompting, the teachers normally drew students' attention to the errors and gave some meta-linguistic clues to encourage students to self-correct. The total time the teachers spent on pronunciation teaching during the observed ninety-minute periods ranged from around two to seven minutes with all but one of the teachers spending between four and seven minutes teaching pronunciation. The pronunciation errors the teachers corrected almost all involved segments, with the exception of a few errors in lexical stress, consonant-vowel linking between words, and intonation in questions, as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. The teachers' pronunciation teaching episodes

Teacher	Recasts	Prompts	Total
1A	Sounds: 13 Linking: 2 Word stress: 2	Sounds: 6 Linking: 2	Sounds: 19 Linking: 4 Word stress: 2
2B	Sounds: 8 Word stress: 1	Sounds: 6; Intonation: 1	Sounds: 14 Intonation: 1 Word stress: 1
3C	Sounds: 4 Linking: 1	Sounds: 2	Sounds: 6 Linking: 1
4D	Sounds: 8 Word stress: 2	Sounds: 5	Sounds: 13 Word stress: 2
5E	Sounds: 11	Sounds: 3 Word stress: 2 Intonation: 1	Sounds: 14 Word stress: 2 Intonation: 1
6F	Sounds: 11 Word stress: 1	Sounds: 6 Word stress: 1	Sounds: 17 Word stress: 2
All teachers	**64** Sounds: 55 Word stress: 6 Linking: 3	**35** Sounds: 28 Word stress: 3 Linking: 2 Intonation: 2	**99** Sounds: 83 Word stress: 9 Linking: 5 Intonation: 2

As seen from Table 3, a total of 99 pronunciation teaching episodes were identified across the six teachers. Of these, 83 episodes were focused on segmental errors of individual sounds, nine

on word stress, five on linking, and two on intonation. The following episodes illustrate the pronunciation teaching approach most commonly taken by the teachers.

Episode 1: (*Note*: T = teacher; S = student; Ss = students)

T: *Okay. Now, which four adjectives do we use to describe this car?*
S1:   *It's stylist and powerful* (pronounced as /pɒwefʊl/ with no lexical stress).
T: *Say 'powerful'* (emphasized lexical stress and vowel production).
S1:   *Powerful.*
T: *That's right. What else? You, please.*
S2:   *Big and fast* (pronounced as /f<u>e</u>s/).
T: *Say 'fast'* (emphasized vowel production and final sound).
S2:   *Fast.*
T: *That's good. Can anyone think of other adjectives?*

Episode 2:

T: *When you make your presentation, if you pronounce incorrectly, then you won't get good scores. Beside content, you must pronounce intelligibly for people to understand. Remember? Say these words again for me, please. How do you say this?* (pointing to the first word in the list)
Ss: *Male* (pronounced very short as /m<u>e</u>ʊ/).
T: *No. Look at the vowel and the final sound. Say…?*
Ss: *male.*
T: *Good. This word?* (pointing to the second word in the list)
SS: *image* (pronounced as /im<u>eɪ</u>/).
T: *not 'me<u>ɪ</u>' but…?*
Ss: *image* (pronounced vowel correctly but dropped the final sound).
T: *Yes. What about the final consonant?*
Ss: *image.*
T: *That's right. Now, say 'image'*
Ss: *image.*

As illustrated in these episodes, the approach to pronunciation teaching by all six teachers almost exclusively consisted of correcting errors in the production of individual sounds at the word level through recasts or awareness-raising for self-correction. In none of the classes did the teacher take a proactive approach to pronunciation teaching involving a pre-planned focus on pronunciation. After watching selected excerpts of their own recorded lesson in the SR interviews, the teachers were asked if these practices reflected how they usually taught pronunciation in class and if they used any other techniques. In response, the teachers confirmed that they never used any other techniques and that this was typically the only way they taught pronunciation in class. The teacher's reliance on corrective feedback and dispreference for explicit, planned teaching of pronunciation confirms previous research which has shown ESL/EFL instructors to typically restrict their pronunciation teaching to giving corrective feedback on their learners' pronunciation errors (Buss, 2013; Foote et al., 2016; D. Murphy, 2011; Wahid & Sulong, 2013).

What beliefs do the teachers hold about their pronunciation teaching?

This section reports on the teachers' beliefs about their pronunciation teaching, including their initial training and PL in pronunciation pedagogy, the pronunciation goals they want their students to attain, the pronunciation features they more frequently focus on, and the factors shaping their pronunciation teaching. In response to the question about their initial training in pronunciation pedagogy, four teachers said they did not receive any formal training in how to teach pronunciation, while two teachers attended two three-hour lectures each about pronunciation teaching theory in their undergraduate programmes. One teacher reported spending 12 weeks auditing general EFL classes where she sometimes had the opportunity to observe her lecturers teaching pronunciation. However, none of the teachers had been involved in PL of any type subsequent to beginning their career as EFL teachers. This suggests that the teachers lacked initial training and PL opportunities in pronunciation teaching during both their pre-service and in-service education. This finding aligns with previous studies which have also found that ESL/EFL teachers lack training and professional development in pronunciation pedagogy (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Baker, 2011; Couper, 2017).

Regarding the goals in pronunciation teaching, all the teachers reported aiming at intelligible pronunciation for successful oral communication rather than native-like pronunciation. For example, Teacher 4D said:

My number-one priority in teaching pronunciation is to help students achieve intelligible pronunciation for successful communication. In English learning, I think the ability to pronounce like a native speaker depends on different factors one of which is the learner's aptitude. But our students have been exposed to English for over seven years, so I think it's very hard for them to acquire a native-like accent now.

According to the teachers, their students are adult learners and so it is difficult for them at this stage to acquire native-like pronunciation. Thus, they considered intelligibility as a desirable pronunciation goal in English learning. This view of ultimate attainment in L2 pronunciation finds support in Cunningham (2009), Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009), and >Munro (2010), amongst others. In other words, the teachers all viewed intelligible pronunciation as an achievable goal for their students, and rejected the goal of accent reduction or native-like pronunciation.

On the question of what pronunciation features they prioritised in their teaching, the teachers all reported focusing on segmentals much more frequently than suprasegmentals since they believed that the former is more important and easier to teach than the latter. As Teacher 5E commented:

I think vowels and consonants are more important than suprasegmental features, so that's why I often teach these. Also, when teaching vowels and consonants, I can use pictures to illustrate my explanations of different places of articulation and students will find it easier to understand. Intonation is quite abstract and it's hard to help students get the hang of it.

However, this belief finds no support from the literature as leading scholars in the field consistently argue that pronunciation instruction should focus on both segmental and suprasegmental features (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Lane & Brown, 2010; Saito, 2012).

In terms of the factors influencing their classroom practice, the teachers' responses showed two main factors as constraining their pronunciation teaching: the curriculum and the learners. The curriculum factors included time constraints (n=6) and course books (n=3), and the learner factors involved types of learner errors (n=6), learner awareness (n=6), proficiency level (n=2), and age (n=1). Interestingly, lack of knowledge and expertise in teaching pronunciation was not mentioned. We speculate that concern with 'losing face' might have discouraged the teachers from raising this factor.

The first factor all the teachers mentioned in talking about their pronunciation teaching was time constraints. According to the teachers, time constraints exacerbated by an overload of language knowledge prescribed in the curriculum and their large classes made explicit pronunciation teaching unfeasible. The following extract is representative:

The number of students and time allotted in the curriculum are the two main factors that influence my pronunciation teaching (...) Giving students more opportunities to practice pronunciation is good ,but the timeframe doesn't allow. If I try to do this [teaching pronunciation explicitly], then I can't finish what I'm required to do by the curriculum. (Teacher 6F)

The teachers all expressed frustration with the large amount of material they were expected to get through in each semester. Two of the teachers stated that only when each student in the class is given an opportunity to practice, perform, and get individual feedback from the teacher does the explicit teaching of pronunciation benefit them. But as they commented, "teaching pronunciation explicitly within a class of 40 to 50 students is a waste of time" (Teacher 4D) because "it is unlikely that all students in the class have enough time for practice, performance and getting feedback from the teacher" (Teacher 3C). Previous research has revealed similar problems. For example, Wahid and Sulong's (2013) study showed that teachers in a Malaysian tertiary EFL setting also reported time constraints to play an influential role in shaping their pronunciation teaching. The same result was found in the EFL context of Hong Kong (Bai & Yuan, 2019).

The second curriculum factor that shaped the teachers' pronunciation teaching was textbooks. Teachers 1A, 2B, and 4D commented that if the course books they were using included pronunciation teaching materials, then they would teach it. But without this material, pressure to finish all the units within an allotted timeframe made pronunciation teaching a low priority. For instance, Teacher 1A said:

(...) The main textbooks and supplementary materials we're using don't have pronunciation instruction content. If we had pronunciation in teaching materials, we could teach it without a need to adapt materials from other sources while still managing to stay on schedule.

Again, the teachers stressed the heavy teaching load in the mandated curriculum. If they tried to adapt pronunciation teaching materials from outside the prescribed textbooks, they said they would fall behind schedule. Consequently, they taught what was prescribed in the curriculum and since pronunciation learning was largely neglected there, they largely ignored it.

The teachers' PTP were also influenced by learner factors, the first of which was learner errors. All the teachers reasoned that the reactive, unplanned pronunciation teaching activities they conducted were useful for correcting common errors. As Teacher 3C explained:

Correcting pronunciation errors not only works for that student but it also makes all other students aware of such errors and so they can correct themselves. So, I can save time for other tasks.

Here, the primary concern of the teachers was efficiency, reflect a strong preference for focused reactive pronunciation teaching which allowed them to stay on schedule in implementing the curriculum. To this end, the teachers all believed that correcting the students' errors as a whole group was the most efficient way to address pronunciation in their classes.

The second learner factor was awareness (Vitanova & Miller, 2002). All the teachers reported that making students aware of their pronunciation errors and encouraging self-correction was beneficial to self-regulated learning, as illustrated in the following extract:

If my students pronounce a certain word incorrectly, then I'll encourage them to look it up in the dictionary and correct it by themselves. Raising the students' awareness of their pronunciation errors for self-correction helps establish a habit of self-regulated learning so they won't rely heavily on the teacher, such that they only study what the teacher teaches. (Teacher 5E)

The benefits of awareness-raising for pronunciation learning have been well established (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Kennedy, Blanchet, & Trofimovich, 2014; Ramírez Verdugo, 2006). In this EFL context, the teachers believed that if their students are more aware of and independent in correcting their own pronunciation errors, then practice will be more effective for improving their pronunciation. As Teacher 1A saw it, raising learner awareness could also positively change students' attitudes towards pronunciation practice. She observed that students tended to treat fluency as more important than pronunciation accuracy in oral interactions and so ignored pronunciation practice. However, Teacher 1A believed that if teachers make students aware that pronunciation errors cause misunderstandings, then they will be more willing to invest in pronunciation practice. She said:

From my own experience and observation, I see that today students tend to aim at fluency rather than pronunciation accuracy in their speaking… But they're not aware that many pronunciation errors in their speaking make their conversation unsuccessful because people don't understand what they say. I think this can be solved by teacher making students well aware of this and then their attitudes towards pronunciation practice will change positively.

The third learner factor that shaped the teachers' PTP was proficiency level. Teachers 2B and 5E stated that their choice of particular pronunciation teaching activities was informed by their sense of what activities were best suited to their students' proficiency. They believed that their low proficiency students benefit from corrective feedback such as recasts and prompts whereas the explicit teaching of pronunciation is more useful for students of higher proficiency level, as illustrated in Teacher 2B's comment:

(...) Only a few students are good at English while most are weak, so I think the best way is to correct their pronunciation errors as I usually do in class (...) They'll be more conscious in practicing pronunciation and more autonomous in their learning. With higher-level students, perhaps I'll teach pronunciation explicitly rather than simply correct errors because it arouses the students' interest in learning pronunciation and makes the classroom atmosphere more welcoming.

Finally, Teacher 6F also identified age as a learner factor that shaped her pronunciation teaching practice. As she commented,

Our students are adult learners. Their pronunciation has fossilized, so it's very difficult to be changed for the better. This is why I only correct students' errors instead of spending time teaching [pronunciation] explicitly.

This belief is not consistent with research findings which show that explicit pronunciation teaching can lead to positive changes in adult learners' speech (Couper, 2006, 2011; Lord, 2008; Saito & Lyster, 2012).

Discussion

The study shows that pronunciation was taught in Vietnamese tertiary EFL classes and that the teachers were able to articulate clear beliefs about their pronunciation teaching. However, consistent with previous research findings in a wide range of settings, our study shows that the teachers restricted their pronunciation teaching to error correction through recasts and/or prompts (e.g., Foote et al., 2011; Foote et al., 2016; Chiu, 2008; Darcy et al., 2011; Murphy, 2011; Wahid & Sulong, 2013). Corrective feedback in the form of recasts and/or prompts has been recognised in the literature as beneficial for learners' language improvement (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Saito & Lyster, 2012). But in pronunciation teaching, Foote et al. (2016) have argued that relying heavily on recasts is of limited value because without explicit instruction that first helps students understand a target phonological feature, they are less likely to benefit from corrective feedback. From this perspective, our finding that the teachers restricted their pronunciation teaching to error correction is not particularly encouraging given that the students were unlikely to have opportunities for on-going, planned practice of the particular pronunciation features they have problems with. Despite this, the teachers were consistent in their belief that this approach was not only effective for improving their students' pronunciation skill but one that had particular utility in the constrained circumstances of limited classroom hours, large classes and a demanding curriculum. These views stand in contrast to previous research which has shown teachers to hold a negative view of correcting their

students' pronunciation errors through recasts and/or prompts (Couper, 2016, 2019; Lyster et al., 2013).

Interestingly, our findings also point to a mismatch between what the teachers said about how they teach pronunciation and how they actually taught it. In the interviews, the teachers reported following deliberate steps such as providing explicit information about places of articulation in teaching pronunciation. However, their pronunciation teaching practices as observed in intact classrooms were limited, and almost always consisted of correcting students' pronunciation errors through recasts (with or without IPA transcriptions) and/or prompts, with little if any explicit or planned teaching of pronunciation. This finding echoes Phipps and Borg's (2009) findings on teacher cognition and grammar-teaching, namely that teachers' stated beliefs about grammar teaching and their actual teaching practices were not consistently aligned. Similarly, the teachers in Wahid & Sulong's (2013) study in a Malaysian tertiary EFL setting reported teaching supra-segmental features explicitly on a regular basis, yet the observational data showed that they mainly focused on correcting segmental errors through repetition.

Thirdly, the study shows that the teachers held strongly to the belief that intelligibility rather than native-like proficiency should be the ultimate goal in L2 pronunciation teaching, a belief that is widely supported by leading scholars of the field such as Couper (2017), Derwing and Munro (2015), Moyer (2013), and Munro (2010). However, their belief that an instructional focus on segmentals rather than prosody was the way to achieve that goal does not align with previous studies. In fact, research has demonstrated that teachers consider suprasegmentals to be important and so deserve more attention in their classes (Couper, 2016, 2017; Wahid & Sulong, 2013). Such a belief finds wide support in the literature because of the high communicative value of suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation (Caspers, 2010; Field, 2005; Hahn, 2004; Kang, Rubin, & Pickering, 2010).

The teachers' comments indicate that the mandated curriculum imposes a heavy teaching load, especially considering the limited teaching time, crowded classes, and low proficiency students. In part, this finding aligns with previous research in which teachers also reported time constraints as a challenge in teaching pronunciation (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Baker & Burri, 2016; Couper, 2016). In the current study, by closely following the mandated curriculum in which pronunciation was reported to be almost entirely absent, the teachers received little in the way of guidance and prompting to teach pronunciation more systematically. Couper (2017), Derwing, Diepenbroek, and Foote (2012), Foote et al. (2011), and others have similarly noted the strong influence of textbooks on the instructors' teaching practice.

Finally, the study findings show that the teachers lacked training and PL in pronunciation pedagogy and thus expressed a strong need for more training opportunities, a consistent finding in previous studies. Derwing (2010), for instance, has pointed out that the number of TESL programmes in Canada offering a full course in pronunciation teaching is limited. Couper (2017) found that teacher participants within the New Zealand ESL context lacked initial training and PL experience in how to teach pronunciation. Similarly, the Hong Kong teachers participating in Bai and Yuan's (2019) study also reported being insufficiently trained in teaching pronunciation. An important and interesting point in our findings is that the teachers,

unlike those in previous studies, did not report their lack of training in pronunciation pedagogy as a factor that constrains the way they deliver pronunciation instruction in their English classes. Research has shown that teachers' initial training has a strong influence on how they teach pronunciation in their language classes (Derwing, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2015; J. Murphy, 2014). In our study, the teachers all reported lacking training and PL opportunities in teaching pronunciation, although they didn't explicitly indicate whether this gap influenced their pronunciation teaching.

Implications and Conclusion

The current study provided a thick description of the pronunciation teaching practices of six experienced EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university, their self-reported experience of learning about pronunciation teaching in pre-service and in-service teacher education, and the beliefs they held about their classroom practice. Generalizing from this data, our findings have revealed a lack of principled attention to pronunciation teaching in the design and implementation of this EFL curriculum. How might this gap be addressed most efficiently and effectively within such a tightly mandated and fully packed curriculum and in such constrained teaching circumstances? We believe that a practical first step would be to include more guidance on pronunciation in course books. It is clear that textbooks are one of the key sources that these teachers rely on to guide their instruction and so offer a valuable vehicle for disseminating such guidance. One advantage of this approach is that such guidance could be inserted into the speaking lessons without requiring more widespread revisions to the curriculum, although ultimately a place for pronunciation learning needs to be better articulated at the curriculum level.

The study also highlights the need for more attention to pronunciation pedagogy in teacher education programmes in the Vietnamese EFL sector. Both content knowledge (knowledge about phonetics and phonology) and pedagogical knowledge (knowledge about pronunciation pedagogy) constitute the knowledge base for pronunciation teaching (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Murphy, 2014). And yet according to the self-reports of the teachers in this study, both were lacking or largely absent in their teacher education. If pronunciation teaching is to be improved, teacher training programmes in Vietnam will need to provide more systematic coverage of pronunciation content and pedagogic knowledge, a point argued for by scholars in other contexts (Burns, 2006; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Foote et al., 2011).

A possible limitation of the observational data is that it is drawn from only two 45-minute lessons taught by each of the six teachers. However, we have some confidence in this data for two reasons. First, we asked the teachers to talk about their general pronunciation teaching practices and specifically to confirm whether or not the observed lesson reflected the approach they typically took. Second, all six teachers reported similar patterns of teaching pronunciation in their English classes.

This study represents an exploratory first step in understanding pronunciation teaching in this context. Clearly, there is a need for further research into pronunciation teaching to extend the findings of the current study. In particular, future studies could examine Vietnamese EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching in other similar settings through intensive observational data

sets coupled with interview data exploring teachers' stated beliefs about their classroom practice. It would also be interesting to see how explicit pronunciation teaching facilitates the pronunciation improvement of learners in this EFL context, including their production of both segmental and suprasegmental features.

In conclusion, the objective of this research was to provide a thick description of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching at a Vietnamese university. In seeking to explore the teachers' beliefs and pronunciation teaching practices in this particular context, we were motivated by the overall goal of contributing to the growing body of international literature on how pronunciation is being taught in the context of contemporary ESL/EFL instruction.

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