



## Who Should Teach English Pronunciation?: Voices of Vietnamese EFL Learners and Teachers

**Thi Thanh Huyen Phuong**

*FPT University, Vietnam*

In the discussion of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNETs) versus native English-speaking teachers (NETs) in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, strengths of NNETs in several aspects of English language teaching (ELT) have been acknowledged, thus contributing to their repositioning in the ELT profession; the same, however, cannot be said about NNETs' status in the field of English pronunciation teaching. This paper reports on an investigation into Vietnamese EFL teachers' and learners' perspectives of who should teach English pronunciation. Data was collected from students via surveys and focus- groups, and from 10 Vietnam teachers of English via interviews and classroom observation. The data was coded and analysed thematically. The study found that while most Vietnamese teachers were ambivalent about their competence as teachers of English pronunciation, learners were able to articulate their views about who and what helped them to improve this aspect of their English. The findings also indicate that learners' level of English proficiency had a significant influence on their views of whether a NET or a NNET was more beneficial for their learning.

**Keywords:** native English speaking teachers, non-native English speaking teachers, NETs vs. NNETs, pronunciation teachers, pronunciation pedagogy, strengths of NNETs, EFL

### Introduction

English users worldwide are conventionally described using Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles: an Inner Circle (traditional bases of English such as the UK, USA and Australia), an Outer Circle (countries where English is a second language such as Singapore, Malaysia and India) and an Expanding Circle (countries where English is a foreign or additional language). On the basis of Krachru's framework, English language has been granted the statuses of a native language (ENL), a second language (ESL), and a foreign language (EFL) accordingly. However, English is expanding rapidly in all parts of today's world and increasingly used in oral communication among people from different cultural and language backgrounds. With such globalization, a new status for English has emerged: English as an international language (EIL), or also called English as a lingual franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2000, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2001). In the Expanding Circle especially, communication in English currently encompasses mainly the communication among non-native English speakers (NNEs) rather than the traditional NNEs-NES communication. For that reason, Jenkins (2017) claims that ELF is, indeed, an "expanding circle phenomenon" (p. 2).

The substantial changes in the use of English together with the burgeoning variations and varieties of English worldwide have put forward the demand for a shift in pedagogical approaches. In the Expanding Circle, conventional ELT practices, which have been strongly native-norm bounded and largely preparing



learners for communication with native-English interlocutors, are clearly challenged, especially with regards to pronunciation models and targets. As such, at the juncture of the two critical issues of English globalisation and English pedagogy in the changing context of English use, a question that concerns ELT researchers, educational administrators and practitioners as well is: who should teach English pronunciation?

In the history of ELT, the strong favour of nativeness as the pronunciation target has led non-native English-speaking teachers (NNETs) to an inferior status compared to their native English-speaking (NES) colleagues. However, in the changing context of English use, the pursuing of nativeness has been strongly contested (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Levis, 2005; Scovel, 2000). Therefore, there has been a call for a shift from nativeness to intelligibility; there also appears the necessity in ELT to reposition NNETs, who constitute the vast majority of English teachers in the world and whose importance should be properly acknowledged. However, little is known about how the calls have been responded, especially in pronunciation pedagogy in EFL contexts where English is being taught mostly by NNETs and for learners to communicate with mainly non-native English speakers.

Aiming at contributing more knowledge to this under-researched but much needed topic of ELT, this current research investigates the position of local teachers in pronunciation pedagogy in Vietnam. Currently, English has been recognized by Vietnamese government as a strategic international language (Vietnamese-Government, 2008). With the active participation of Vietnam in a variety of regional and international organizations and forums such as WTO (World Trade Organization), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), English is increasingly used by the Vietnamese to communicate with interlocutors from a wide range of cultural and language backgrounds. In such a context, the most relevant theoretical framework for the current research is English as an international language (EIL). According to Jenkins (2000), the identification of a system of core phonological features is critical in EIL pronunciation pedagogy. Jenkins (2002) proposed Lingual Franca Core, a system of critical English phonological features that are empirically found to cause breakdowns in international communication. LFC, thus, frees teachers and learners of English from the overwhelming task of conforming to every single aspect of NES phonology; instead, the framework offers immense space for the presentation of local English accents once learners master the core features. Within Jenkins' framework, I would argue that NNETs around the could be more confidently claim their own legitimacy as teachers of English pronunciation; and the traditional cling to the adoption of NETs as the best pronunciation teachers as widely reported in EFL world thus should be challenged.

## Literature Review

### NETs versus NNETs in ELT

ELT profession has long held an assumption that native English teachers are more qualified as linguistic norm providers and, thus, more qualified as teachers of English (Holliday, 2006; Wang, 2012). Not only has this fallacy created a barrier for NNETs in the ELT job market (Lippi-Green, 2012; Mahboob & Golden, 2013), it has also impacted teachers' and learners' perceptions of who would make "good" teachers of English. Literature has noted that the status of non-native English speakers often serves as a major source of anxiety, the sense of inferiority (Brinton, 2004), and insecurity (Bernat, 2008) for NNETs. For learners, it has been well documented that many ESL/EFL learners favour NETs over NNETs for a variety of reasons, particularly for the former's perceived superior English accents and proficiency (Mahboob, 2004; Timmis, 2002). The majority of participants in Wang (2012) is reported to believe that NETs are the only ones who could teach the English which is 'authentic' and 'beautiful' (p. 6). In the study by Levis (2015), learners believed that native-speaker input was critical in their pronunciation development. However, some factors unrelated to the teachers' accent have also been found to influence learners' preference of NETs including teachers' race or learners' perception of

whether teachers were non-native or native speakers rather than their actual relation to English (Williamson & Kelch, 2002).

In recent decades, research findings have indicated several strengths of NNETs. Their knowledge of learners' culture and challenges in learning English enable them to tailor their teaching methods to learners' needs and contexts (see Canagarajah, 1999; Forman, 2016; Liaw, 2012). In the study by Forman (2016), NNETs' use of the learners' L1 in teaching was found to be a powerful means to facilitate learners' L2 learning. Even on language ground, Medgyes (1994) claimed that NNETs are not necessarily less competent as users of the English language compared to NETs. Learners around the world have also placed greater value on different aspects of teachers' pedagogy and linguistic ability compared to their 'nativeness' as English speakers (see, for example, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005).

Although the aforementioned findings have significantly enhanced the position of NNETs in the ELT industry, the native-speaker ideology still persists in regard to the teaching of English pronunciation. Research in the field of pronunciation pedagogy has widely indicated that the status of non-native English speakers significantly hinders NNETs from seeing themselves as adequate teachers of English pronunciation (Bai & Yuan, 2018; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Ma, 2012) and possessing native English accents may be perceived as sufficient to qualify teachers to teach pronunciation well (Bai & Yuan, 2018; Henderson et al., 2015). Non-native teacher trainees in different Asian EFL contexts such as Taiwan and Cambodia, despite the confidence in their own pronunciation and seeing themselves as good teachers of English, were concerned that they were unwanted due to their non-native accents (Ma, 2012) and avoided choosing their own English as classroom models (Lim, 2016).

Learners, on their part, may acknowledge NNETs' strengths in several aspects of English teaching but often rate NETs higher as teachers of pronunciation (Ke & Suzuki, 2011; Levis, Sonsaat, & Link, 2017; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014; Wang, 2012). Interestingly, despite their preference of NETs over NNETs regarding pronunciation teaching, learners often fail distinguishing non-native speakers' from native speakers' speech (Levis et al., 2017; Williamson & Kelch, 2002). These findings suggest that learners' preference of NETs may be just manifestation of native-speaker ideology.

Though the assumption of NETs being better than NNETs at teaching pronunciation has been strongly influential, there is yet strong evidence to support that. In contrast, when investigating the effectiveness of NETs versus NNETs in teaching pronunciation, Levis, Sonsaat, Link, and Barriuso (2016) found that it is teachers' pedagogical methods that matter in the improvement of learners' pronunciation performance rather than their accents. This finding has provided important empirical evidence to boost NNETs' confidence in the position of pronunciation teachers.

## **NETs versus NNETs in Pronunciation Pedagogy in Vietnam**

In Vietnam, pronunciation pedagogy is an area of TESOL that is arguably a major factor in the struggle of Vietnamese learners to communicate successfully in English; the discussion of NNETs versus NETs and international intelligibility in pronunciation pedagogy in Vietnam, however, does not seem relevant yet. It is observed that the influences of the wisdom of ESL pedagogy remain powerful in Vietnamese ELT, especially in the aspects of English models and the conceptualisation of qualified teachers of English pronunciation (Phan, 2018). On their part, Vietnamese students still show a strong favour toward NETs whenever oral communication skills and pronunciation are considered (Phuong, 2018; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). Investigating the issue of NNETs versus NETs from recruiters' perspectives, Doan (2016) finds that in some Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, expatriate NNETs would never have the chance of being recruited, or if considered as a second choice for financial reasons, they would have several hurdles to overcome to gain the trust of host institutes and local teachers in their professional capacity. The status of both local and expatriate NNETs discussed hereby is not unexpected given the strong assumption in Southeast Asia that NETs are "the gold standard of spoken and written English" (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014, p. 1). Given such a strong bias for NETs over NNETs' pronunciation in Vietnam, Phuong (2020b) while reviewing the framework of native English as a lingual franca (NELF)

proposed by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015), suggested that the use of native English models can be considered as a point of reference for pronunciation instruction in such EFL contexts as Vietnam as long as the notions of goals and models are clearly distinguished; she, however, also noted that it is hard to adopt native English models for instruction without enhancing the sense of native-speakerism in such a context, where the impacts of native-speakerism are so profound.

In the biggest-ever foreign language teaching project of Vietnamese government – “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008-2020”, the ability of Vietnamese learners to conduct successful communication in English has been highlighted as the strategic goal. To achieve that communicative competence, it is no longer possible to ignore the changing status of English in today’s world, the unique features of such Asian EFL contexts as Vietnam, and the roles of NNETs in general and local NNETs in particular.

As such, though the matter of NETs versus NNETs regarding pronunciation teaching has arose as a major issue, this matter is under-presented in ELT research in general and in Vietnam particularly. Teachers’ and learners’ account of who should make good teachers of English pronunciation, as previously discussed, has just emerged as a by-product of NNETs/NETs study in general. The information from those studies is valuable; nevertheless, the depth and breathe of the knowledge that we gain about teachers’ and learners’ perception of NNETs/NETs teaching pronunciation may be limited. Furthermore, few ELT studies that especially look at the topic such as those by Bai and Yuan (2018), Levis et al. (2016) only look at the issue from either teachers’ or learners’ perspectives.

This research, therefore, aims to fill the gap in pronunciation pedagogy research and to gain more knowledge, which may hopefully contribute to the repositioning of NNETs in pronunciation pedagogy, especially in the EFL context of Vietnam. Different from previous studies, the current research seeks to obtain views of both teachers and students about the matter with the following research questions:

- 1) How do Vietnamese teachers perceive themselves as teachers of English pronunciation?
- 2) What are Vietnamese students’ perspectives of who should make better teachers of English pronunciation?

## **Methodology**

### **The Context of the Study**

The current study is a part of a bigger project which is based at a university in Hanoi that offers major studies in areas other than English language studies. This university provides an English Preparation Course (EPC) of six months for students whose English proficiency is lower than IELTS 5.5 (TOEFL 477–510) at entrance. The aims of the course are to prepare students with sufficient English to study selected subjects of their majors through the medium of English and, more importantly, to become competitive in the global job market after graduation.

### **Participants**

Participants of this study include 10 Vietnamese teachers of English and 87 students who were in EPC. The teachers, aged between 30 and 41, were all female and had achieved their master’s degrees in TESOL either from a domestic or an overseas higher education institute. Their experience in English teaching varies between eight and 18 years. As for students, they were of different English levels and disciplines and were all in EPC at the time of data collection. The students’ ages range from 18 to 20.

## Procedures

In Spring 2015, I contacted all Vietnamese teachers teaching EPC at the time. Ten out of the total 13 teachers showed interest to take part in the study. Teachers participated in two rounds of semi-structured interviews. The first round took place at the beginning of the semester. At interviews, teachers were invited to discuss their views regarding who should teach English pronunciation in Vietnam, especially their perception of themselves in the position, and also how they believed their students perceived them as pronunciation teachers, if they felt willing and comfortable to discuss the topic. The second round of interviews was five weeks later and mainly for the purposes of member checking and more in-depth exploration of the issues raised in the first interviews. In the bigger project from which this research emerges, there were classroom observations that were sandwiched between the first and second interviews. As such, the second-round interviews were also aimed to provide the author with a chance to seek explanations/clarifications for questions emerging in relation to the classes observed. However, it should be noted that the knowledge of teachers' perspectives in the current study is obtained via the analysis of interview data only. Both rounds of interviews were conducted face-to-face at the site and audio-recorded. Interviews were semi-structured in nature with the aim to guide but not constrain discussion. On average, each of the interviews with teachers was roughly 45 minutes in length making up the total of 15 interview hours.

As previously mentioned, two classes of each interviewed teacher were observed; and I recruited student participants for focus groups and survey questionnaires among volunteers from those classes. First, one set of data was collected from students via survey around the time of classroom observations. Survey questionnaires were delivered to three of the observed classes on the basis of random selection. Eighty-seven responses were returned and salient patterns that emerged from the survey data served as a guideline to explore learners' perspectives of their preferred pronunciation teachers in more depth through four follow-up focus group interviews. The four focus groups were also conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded adding almost four-hour recording data.

Given that participants and I shared the first language -Vietnamese, also that speaking in participants' first language would allow them to respond in full, especially in such in-depth discussions, interviews with teachers and focus-group interviews with students were conducted in Vietnamese.

## Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed in the following ways.

### Survey data

As indicated earlier, in the current study, survey questionnaires provided just a small part of data, which served to provide guidelines for in-depth exploration into students' perspectives regarding teachers of English pronunciation that took place later through focus groups. The survey data, therefore, were tabulated and analysed manually using Excel and then categorised in predetermined themes.

### Interview and focus-group data

All interviews with teachers and focus groups with students were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. The transcription of each interview and focus group was then read several times by the author in search for themes. The themes found from teacher-interview and focus-group data were then compared with each other and with those emerging from the questionnaire data to bring out sharp contrasts, similarities and complementary information. Necessary sections from the interview and focus-group data then were translated into English by the author.

## Findings and Discussion

### Teachers' Views of Themselves as Inappropriate Teachers of English Pronunciation

Data from teacher interviews presents two main themes: 1) teachers' lack of confidence in teaching English pronunciation due to the limited teaching methodology and 2) teachers' lack of confidence in their own accented English.

#### Insufficient pronunciation teaching methods

When teachers were asked how they felt about pronunciation teaching and how they perceived themselves in the position of pronunciation teachers, one major theme that emerges is teachers' low confidence in teaching pronunciation due to their limited knowledge of how to teach the aspect. Following are some representative comments:

*Well, I think am not very confident about teaching it[pronunciation]. You know, sometimes I am unsure about how to teach it effectively. (Binh, Interview 1)*

*We were not well prepared to teach it (pronunciation). (Thao, Interview 1)*

*It [the teaching of pronunciation] is more difficult than teaching other skills and aspects of English...When we were at university, no one taught us how to teach pronunciation. They taught us how to teach grammar, vocab, reading, writing...but no...not about pronunciation. (Dung, Interview 1)*

*The only way I know to teach pronunciation is asking students to listen and repeat. It just does not work but I don't know what else to do... It is the way my teachers taught me pronunciation when I was at the uni. (Hanh, Interview 1)*

The prominent sentiments among the majority of the teachers as indicated from the comments above are the feelings of being “not confident”, “unsure”, and being unable. Dung explicitly linked the dilemma she faced in teaching pronunciation with the lack of training in her teacher education. Thao' comment was less direct about the reasons why she felt “unprepared”; the discussion with her afterward revealed that not only the lack of training in her teacher education but also the absence of professional development related to pronunciation teaching during her teaching career were to be blamed. Hanh, not knowing how to teach, relied on her own observations of how her teachers had taught her pronunciation at the university for guidance. According to Baker (2014), previous learning experience serves as an important foundation for the development of teachers' cognition and classroom practices. However, in this case, such experience was not very helpful for Hanh when the only teaching technique, *listen-and-repeat*, which she had been exposed to and applied in her classes just “doesn't work”. Due to the perception of having deficit teaching methods, she also claimed to be “discouraged” from teaching pronunciation. For the same reason, Hong, Tu, and Binh also disclosed being reluctant to teach this aspect sometimes (Interview 1). The finding hereby strongly resonates previous research findings in the field, which have widely indicated that in several contexts, in both EFL and even ESL world, teachers are not well-trained to teach pronunciation, and thus they often feel lack of confidence teaching this aspect of English (see, for example, Baker, 2014; Derwing, 2018; J. Murphy, 2014; Phuong, 2020a).

Only two out of the ten interviewed teachers, Thuy and Le, said they were confident teaching this aspect and could make pronunciation classes “as interesting and effective as those of any other skills” (Le, Interview 1). However, in an instance when discussing about the possibility of being assigned to teach English pronunciation as a separated subject, Thuy seemed to be reluctant commenting that “if

pronunciation is taught on regular basis, say one or two hours every week, it would become a boring experience for both teachers and students” (Interview 1). It should be noted that pronunciation was not an official component of English curriculum in the context of this study at the time of data collection. Given Thuy’s reluctance, I would argue that when pronunciation is a separate subject rather than an additional content in a multi-skill English curriculum, pronunciation teaching would extend for longer time and require more teaching techniques and class activities; Thuy might not have been methodologically prepared enough to afford that.

Another comment that deserves attention is Thao’s. While expressing her willingness to overcome the disadvantage of having limited knowledge of how to teach pronunciation, Thao said:

*I think my pronunciation instruction is not as professional as native teachers [NETs] but because it [pronunciation] is necessary, I try to teach it as best as I can. (Interview 1)*

When further asked about the reason why she evaluated her own pronunciation teaching ‘not as professional’ as NETs’, Thao said NETs’ possessed two factors that she did not: “the best pronunciation” and “better methods to teach pronunciation”. The association of NETs with positive traits of pronunciation teachers seems quite expectable given that the influences of native-speaker ideology still remains powerful in many parts of the EFL world, especially in Southeast Asia as discussed earlier (see, for example, Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014). Such traces of native speakerism are also evident here in Thao’s comment. The former factor, NETs’ “best pronunciation”, will be discussed later; the latter claim that NETs have better pronunciation teaching methods would deserve more comments. Though it may be true that pronunciation pedagogy attracts more attention and did so much earlier in ESL in comparison with EFL contexts, it is by no means that NETs would unquestionably possess “better methods to teach pronunciation” than NNETs. On the one hand, it is claimed that NNETs in several EFL contexts may not be as well-trained to teach pronunciation as they are to teach other aspects of English language (Derwing, 2018; Phuong, 2020a). When investigating Vietnamese learners’ perspectives of corrective feedback on pronunciation, Phuong and Phuong (2019) also found that local NNETs were not so well-prepared in terms of teaching methodology that they mostly relied on feedback to teach pronunciation. Phuong (2019) observed that *listen-and-repeat* was dominantly used in almost every instance of pronunciation instruction provided by local Vietnamese teachers due to their limited teaching-technique repertoire. On the other hand, it should be noted that NETs all over the world are also reported to be poorly trained in this aspect of English pedagogy (Baker, 2014; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; MacDonald, 2002; J. Murphy, 2014). Moreover, in many Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, native English-speaking holiday makers who do not have qualifications in TESOL are widely recruited to teach English (Doan, 2016); in such a scenario, the assumption that NETs having better methods of teaching pronunciation would be poorly grounded.

The current research reveal the poor preparation Vietnamese teachers got to teach English pronunciation. This disadvantage, in fact, has formed a major cause of their low confidence and high anxiety in teaching this aspect. The finding well illuminates the note of Derwing (2018) that teachers worldwide often report hesitance teaching pronunciation due to inadequate teacher training in this aspect. Indeed, the neglect of pronunciation teaching methods is evident even in such ESL contexts as Canada (Foote et al., 2011) and Australia (MacDonald, 2002).

### **Inappropriate providers of English pronunciation model**

The interviewed teachers seem to be divided regarding their self-image of model providers for English pronunciation. The majority of them expressed a strong refusal of themselves as model providers of English pronunciation in the English classroom. In the context of this study in particular and in Vietnam in general, English spoken by Vietnamese teachers is, for most students, the main source of exposure to spoken English. However, in response to my question about the possibility of Vietnamese teachers’

English being used as the instructional model, the majority of interviewed teachers were strongly against the idea regardless of different levels of teachers' self-confidence in their own English pronunciation. Teachers who were less confident stated that:

*Using Vietnamese teachers' English as the model would introduce a high risk because it would mean teaching students with English that is non-standard. (Hanh, Interview 1)*

*No!! We cannot teach students with pronunciation that is not accurate enough. (Dung, Interview 1)*

For some other teachers, who were more confident in their English pronunciation, the concern was that students' English pronunciation may depart from the common norms if they followed a less than perfect approximation of native-speaker English. The teachers also envisioned possible issues in international communication that learners may have to face as consequences of following a less standard model.

*I would never agree to such an idea...we should follow native-speaker standard pronunciation.... We – teachers – can achieve only seventy or eighty per cent of native-speaker pronunciation, so if students learn from us, I wonder what their pronunciation will be like?... I will never agree. (Le, Interview 2)*

*British English and American English are global standards, so if they follow these models, they follow internationally recognised standard points of reference. If they learn Vietnamese English from Vietnamese teachers, international interlocutors will find it hard to understand them. (Tu, Interview 2)*

With a similar level of assertiveness, Anh added:

*Oh no no, the role of Vietnamese teachers is just to guide students. I always remind my students that "my English is not the standard you should follow. (Interview 2)*

In the above comments, native English models were repeatedly associated with the term "standard" while the pronunciation models provided by Vietnamese teachers of English themselves were described as of "high risk", "non-standard" and "not accurate enough". Though NNETs, even those who are highly accomplished, often feel insecure about using their own English speech as instructional models (Canagarajah, 2005), the belief that native English speakers' (NESs) pronunciation is "standard" and "accurate" can be problematic. Indeed, in the scenario of global communication in English, NESs are no longer considered the guardian of mutual intelligibility, which is fluid and contingent upon interlocutors. From the perspective of language rights, Jenkins (2000) summarizes the views of scholars in the past five decades saying that "native speakers" do not own EIL; as such, the assumption that NETs' pronunciation models can be the "standard" of accuracy and the key to intelligibility among EIL users, such as Vietnamese and their international interlocutors, would evoke much doubt.

Additionally, in the view of the majority of the interviewed teachers, including especially Tu, Le, and Dung, adopting NETs' pronunciation models is conflated with learners achieving intelligibility while using Vietnamese teachers' English pronunciation model inherently entails learners' failure or difficulties in making themselves understood in EIL communication. This assumption does not seem to be well supported given that native English varieties have long been found the least intelligible (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). Furthermore, the so-called "global standards" Tu mentioned, including General American (GA) and Standard British English (SBE), are actually spoken by a minority of native English speakers, and intelligibility is far from being guaranteed among NESs who speak different varieties of the language (Jenkins, 2000). Furthermore, Levis et al. (2016) pointed out that when discussing the quality of pronunciation teaching provided by NETs and NNETs, teachers' status as NETs or NNETs and their

native or non-native English accents were found to be irrelevant; the authors also concluded that NETs and NNETs can be equally effective in helping their students to improve their pronunciation performance.

Nevertheless, three out of the ten interviewed teachers were confident seeing themselves as adequate norm providers of English pronunciation. One of the teachers, Thuy said:

*Vietnamese English can be a good model for students to follow as long as teachers paid attention to “standardising their pronunciation according to a standard native-speaker model. (Thuy, Interview 2)*

When asked what she meant by “standardising”, Thuy emphasized that it was a “must” for teachers to correct their pronunciation in terms of word pronunciation including especially word stress according to a British or American dictionary. She also proudly mentioned a couple of times in the interviews that “on several occasions, my students often comment that my English just sounds like a native speaker’s”. Though one may still somehow see in Thuy’s later comment the image of EFL teachers reported elsewhere, who tend to feel more reassured and legitimate to teach pronunciation when their own pronunciation is perceived as native like (Golombek & Jordan, 2005), Thuy seemed to be comfortable with her English pronunciation, which conforms more strictly to some certain aspects of native norms such as word stress but not necessarily so to the others. Thuy, however, did not seem to be aware of Lingual Franca Core (LFC) (Jenkins, 2000, 2002), which indicates that word stress is not useful in ensuring intelligibility of EIL speakers.

Another teacher of the group, Nu, was not only confident about Vietnamese teachers’ English pronunciation being the instructional model but also acknowledged the adoption as realistic and compatible with the context of Vietnamese ELT:

*Vietnamese teachers’ English was good enough for students to imitate...uhm, I meant though liked or disliked, Vietnamese teachers’ English is already the English source for students’ daily exposure ... (Nu, Interview 2).*

The third teacher, Hong, appeared to say that students’ achieving English pronunciation that was similar to their Vietnamese teachers would be quite adequate; however, it should be up to students themselves to make the decision whether to follow Vietnamese teachers’ model or not:

*Of course, I cannot speak English as well as native speakers, but if students can get the same level of accuracy as mine, then it is fine. Certainly, students shouldn’t be forced to follow us, but if they choose to, then it is completely ok. (Interview 2)*

Clearly, it remains a common view among the interviewed teachers that Vietnamese teachers should not be the model providers of English pronunciation and the pronunciation models of NES should be adopted instead. This is consistent with the finding of Phan (2018) who finds that Vietnamese teachers, including those who are aware of the diversity of English in the world today, still persistently opted American or British English as instructional models. Literature has widely indicated that the achieving of native-like pronunciation is very rare among adult language learners (see, for example, Levis, 2005; Scovel, 2000); such an overemphasis on native pronunciation models as found here, thus, unavoidably conveys an implicit message which is claimed to be “unfair and perhaps even unethical” to lead learners to the belief that they will one day be able to achieve such native pronunciation (J. M. Murphy, 2014, p. 259). Moreover, an overriding consideration by most teachers at the interviews appeared to be the degree of intelligibility that the students would achieve. However, the concept of intelligibility is strongly bound to the norms of NESs, the conformation to which may no longer works to ensure learners’ intelligibility in EIL communication. However, it is notable that some teachers in the current study seemed to be comfortably constructing their own images as legitimate NNETs of pronunciation; this open view of

teachers' toward an alternative pronunciation model is significant to the repositioning of NNETs themselves in ELT profession in general and pronunciation pedagogy in particular.

## Students' Perspectives of Who Should Teach English Pronunciation

In the current study, there is a lack of homogeneity regarding students' responses towards the question "who do you want to be taught pronunciation with?". The answers are found to depend on students' English proficiency and reveal three main views: the favour of NETs, the favour of a balance between NETs and NNETs, and the favour of foreign teachers with good English pronunciation irrespective of whether they are native or non-native speakers of English.

### Preference of NETs as teachers of pronunciation

The dominant view expressed in both the survey (Table 1 below) and interviews was students' favour of NETs to teach English pronunciation. Eighty per cent of the surveyed students (70 out of 87 participants) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I prefer a native speaker teacher of English to teach me pronunciation" while only 30% of surveyed students (26 out of 87) showed their (strong) agreement in response to the statement that "I prefer Vietnamese teachers of English to teach me pronunciation". It should be noted that among the participants, nine indicated their preference for both NETs and Vietnamese teachers to teach English pronunciation. They may have experienced difficulty in making decision between whether NETs or Vietnamese teachers who they really preferred to teach them this aspect. However, the clearly emerging pattern is the favour of NETs over local teachers regarding pronunciation teaching.

TABLE 1

#### *Preferred teachers of English pronunciation*

<u>Statements</u>	<u>(Strongly) Agree</u> (Percentage/ No of students)	<u>Unsure</u> (Percentage/ No of students)	<u>(Strongly) Disagree</u> (Percentage/ No of students)
I prefer native-speaker teachers of English to teach me pronunciation.	80.4% (70)	13.7% (12)	5.7% (5)
I prefer Vietnamese teachers of English to teach me pronunciation	30% (26)	65% (57)	4.5% (4)

Data from focus-group interviews below supplements questionnaire data revealing several underlying reasons of this preference.

**NETs' 'standard' pronunciation.** The focus group data illuminate the survey data showing that the majority of participants in focus-group interviews claimed to prefer NETs for their pronunciation. Though this view was strong among both lower and advanced students, it was more frequently cited by students of lower levels. Following are some representative comments:

*I prefer native-English speaking teachers because their pronunciation is standard and if I have three hours with them in every lesson, my pronunciation will improve much. (Thong, Focus Group 1)*

*When learning pronunciation at previous education levels, one teacher taught me to pronounce something in one way while another teacher taught me to pronounce the same thing in a different way. It was so confusing and I was disoriented. So, I prefer native-English teachers because I know for sure that what they teach me is standard. (Tra, FG 3)*

Several other lower-level students reiterated the point saying that native English-speaking teachers speak “original” (Nga, FG 2) and “accurate English” so they were “worry-free” (Lan, FG 3) about the models they were taught and exposed to. In the case of Tra in the quote above and some other students, some negative experience with non-native speaker pronunciation teachers in the past also reinforces a stronger trust for NETs.

It seems that no matter how much English and its uses have changed, many students in the context of this study seem to share a strong belief with their teachers that pronunciation models provided by NETs are “standard” and “the best” despite the claim that NES norms are currently just of little, or even no relevance to EIL communication. The finding hereby is consistent with those of several previous studies which report learners’ favour of NETs teaching aspects of oral communication in general and teaching pronunciation in particular in different Asian EFL contexts such as Cambodia (Lim, 2016), Japan (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014), Vietnam (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014), China (Hui, 2008; Ling & Braine, 2007) and Jordan (Al-ghazo, 2013). The native speaker ideology clearly remain influential among students in this study; this, however, is just a compatible piece of a whole picture, in which the adherence to native norms remains strong not only among teachers (as previously discussed) but also at administrative level (see, for example, Doan, 2016) and evident in textbook models.

**NETs’ better pronunciation pedagogy.** In addition to the appreciation of NETs for their “standard” pronunciation, some students also claimed that NETs have better methods of pronunciation teaching:

*As to pronunciation, I want to have native-English teachers to teach me because I had some experience learning pronunciation with some native teachers in the past and they taught us to adjust our mouths, curl our tongues and articulate sounds in ways that I found very effective.* (Hoang, FG 3)

Though this theme arises only among a minority of students, Hoang’s observations above match the teacher participants’ own claim of seriously lacking pronunciation teaching methods. Due to the poor training, or even the absence of teacher training in the field of pronunciation pedagogy, it is understandable that Vietnamese teachers may not familiar with kinaesthetic activities and physical illustrations that are much needed in effective pronunciation instruction that Hoang experienced with his NETs and described above.

**Positive attitudes towards Vietnamese teachers of English pronunciation.** Though expressing preference for NETs to teach pronunciation mainly for their perceived ‘standard’ or the ‘best’ pronunciation, students also indicated strongly positive attitudes towards their Vietnamese teachers teaching pronunciation and/or Vietnamese teachers’ English pronunciation. Some representative students said:

*... When we have problems in learning pronunciation, Vietnamese teachers can explain in Vietnamese, and it is much easier for us to understand.* (Quang, Focus Group 1)

*I like the English spoken by my Vietnamese teachers. I find it very lovely and easy to understand.* (Sang, FG 2)

*I think Vietnamese teachers’ pronunciation is easier to understand ... uhm, I think for beginning levels, we should best learn pronunciation with Vietnamese teachers.* (Tung, Focus 1)

*... I think there is no problem learning pronunciation with Vietnamese teachers. Their English is clear, they are closed to us and understanding.* (Dai, FG 4)

The comments highlight different strengths of Vietnamese teachers. Quang acknowledged Vietnamese teachers' ability in providing assistance that students cannot seek from a NET and when other instructional techniques of pronunciation pedagogy failed thanks to Vietnamese teachers' sharing the same L1 with their students. In Sang and Tung' comments, Vietnamese teachers' English is recurrently associated with positive traits such as "easy to understand", "lovely" and Vietnamese teachers teaching English is perceived as "no problem", "close and understanding" to students. The teachers were especially indicated as "the best" choice for beginners of English pronunciation. These positive attitudes and sentiments towards Vietnamese teachers teaching English pronunciation may explain why a significant number of surveyed students (57%) responded "unsure" to the statement "I prefer Vietnamese teachers of English to teach me pronunciation" and only 4.5% of students disagreed with this (see Table 1). For these 57% of surveyed students, there seems to be tension within them generated by their desire to pursue a native model provided by NETs on one hand and several positive feelings they have towards their Vietnamese teachers, their English pronunciation and pronunciation pedagogy on the other hand. Clearly, no matter how reluctant several Vietnamese teachers see themselves as teachers of pronunciation, their students see in them many strengths and react positively to the idea of Vietnamese teachers teaching pronunciation.

### **A combination of NNETs and NETs in pronunciation teaching among advanced students**

Another major pattern is found among all advanced learners at the focus groups. Those students clearly indicate that they preferred a combination of Vietnamese and native-English speaking teachers to teach pronunciation. Some of the student's comments are:

*Uhm ... I think both native teachers and Vietnamese teachers are good, but at different things. I mean ... like they can complement each other. (Dai, FG 4)*

*Well ... I agree with my friend that both native teachers and Vietnamese teachers teaching pronunciation is fine. They can help us to speak better in different way. (Duc, FG 4)*

The desire to learn pronunciation with both teacher groups and the underlying reasons for students' valuing local teachers by the students quoted above and several others at the focus groups are well captured in the following comment:

*I want the combination of one lesson with a native English-speaking teacher and then one lesson with a Vietnamese teacher because with native teachers I can learn the most correct pronunciation of words, placement of stress and so on. On the other hand, Vietnamese teachers can explain why these are so in the most comprehensible way. Also, as Vietnamese learners of English, they can help to locate our most problematic fields and help to correct our mistakes most effectively. (Ha, FG 4)*

It seems that the knowledge of Vietnamese phonology in addition to that of English phonology has enabled local teachers to provide valuable pedagogical assistance that could hardly be provided by anyone else. That is evident in their ability to identify problems facing Vietnamese learners in performing several features of English pronunciation due to L1 transfer, to explain the problems in an accessible way to students, and most importantly to effectively help students to overcome these with the experience of senior insiders.

Comments from higher-level students seem to highlight the importance of both native English and local teachers for their specific strengths. Some of these students still pursue English accents provided by native-English speaker teachers; however, being more advanced in English knowledge and abilities, they appeared to be able to recognise profoundly how their learning could benefit from local teachers as well. Thus, they took into account both L2 pronunciation accuracy, and pedagogic effectiveness. The finding

here suggests that the collaboration of both NETs and NNETs in pronunciation classes would be not only favourable but also beneficial to EFL learners. This model of teaching has actually been considered in speaking classes in some Asian contexts such as Taiwan (Luo, 2006) and may need further attention to be effective for EFL learners' pronunciation learning.

### **Preference of foreign teachers with good pronunciation**

A third point was expressed by a minority of lower-level students as follows:

*I like foreigners to teach me pronunciation no matter whether they are native-English speakers or not. (Dang, FG 1)*

When discussing further the reasons for this response, another student in the focus added that what matters most to him is that teachers have good pronunciation for students to follow. Another student claimed:

*Learning pronunciation with foreign teachers who have good pronunciation is good because the foreign teacher will create a good environment to communicate in English. If teachers are Vietnamese, Vietnamese is still used sometimes and it limits our opportunities to communicate in English. (Hoang, FG 3)*

As in the above comments, good English pronunciation provided by NNETs can be aspirational alternatives for NES models. It should be added that, at the time of my data collection, some "foreign" but non-native speaker teachers employed at the research site were local teachers from the Philippines. As such, it seems to matter less which nationalities are represented in the teaching staff than the teachers' provision of good models to follow and sufficient opportunities to practise. This finding hereby contributes another accepting voice from learners in the Expanding Circle towards non-native English pronunciations described in Rooy (2009).

## **Conclusion**

This research adopts social cultural approach in data collection and analysis. It investigates teachers' and learners' beliefs of who should teach English pronunciation in Vietnam. The study indicates a significant discrepancy between the teachers' and learners' views, especially that of Vietnamese teachers as teachers of English pronunciation.

The study found that most Vietnamese teachers did not see themselves as adequate teachers of English pronunciation mainly due to their non-native English accent and/or insufficient knowledge of pronunciation-teaching methods. While the latter reason has been commonly reported as a dilemma facing teachers of English in both ESL and EFL worlds (Derwing, 2018), the former reflects the profound impact of the social-cultural context in which Vietnamese teachers are working, and in which NES mindset is still dominant. While refusing themselves as adequate norm providers of English pronunciation, the teachers mostly quoted the concern that their modelling/teaching English pronunciation will jeopardise their learners' intelligibility. Clearly, "intelligibility" is being conceptualised as an inherent quality of only NETs' speech. Such a belief of fallacy is serving a huge barrier for teachers in the current study to construct the identity of legitimate NNETs of pronunciation.

Different from their teachers, students presented a range of views regarding who they wanted to teach them pronunciation. Though the favour of NETs for their native accents remains salient, what significant is that students clearly acknowledged several strengths of their local teachers in pronunciation teaching including the teachers' English pronunciation which is described as "clear", "easy to understand" and

“lovely”. In addition, some quite open views towards alternatives for NES as the pronunciation teachers were expressed by many students at focus groups. This acceptance includes a group of students claiming what matter is teachers’ good pronunciation to follow, not that teachers are NETs or NNETs. Higher-level students especially highlighted NETs and local teachers’ own strengths and asserted that the two teacher groups can effectively complement each other. Given Vietnamese teachers’ poor confidence seeing themselves in the role of pronunciation teachers, the findings hereby suggest that the teachers did not seem to be well aware of their own strengths in pronunciation pedagogy; neither seem they be aware of how well they are evaluated by their students in pronunciation pedagogy.

## **Recommendations**

In today’s world, learners of English are mostly and increasingly taught by NNETs. However, the current study indicates that the authority of NETs as the guardian of accuracy and intelligibility still remains powerful. Also, Vietnamese teachers largely believed that their teaching pronunciation will reduce students’ intelligibility in English. Clearly, it is high time that EFL teachers stopped seeing themselves as failed or illegitimate pronunciation teachers and started constructing their self-image of multicompetent teachers of English. To assist this re-imaging process, the introduction of such knowledge as world Englishes and intelligibility versus nativeness would benefit EFL teachers greatly in embracing their NNET identity, which in turn would empower them in the position of pronunciation teachers. This knowledge can be brought to the teacher via professional development opportunities in the forms of seminars, workshops, or online courses.

In addition, it is important that Vietnamese teachers and learners of English be made aware of the existence of LFC (Jenkins, 2000, 2002) and findings of the studies which draw upon LFC and works towards the core phonological features of English that are especially critical in Asian EFL learners’ intelligibility such as those by Deterding (2010). This theoretical premises will unquestionably help to tune teaching in a more realistic and effective approach and remove the unnecessary burden of conforming to every single feature of native English phonology for both EFL teachers and learners.

Last but not least, to shift away from the cling to NES norms, and thus to NETs, in pronunciation pedagogy towards the acceptance of NNETs and NNETs’ models, it is important that textbook writers and material designers do their parts. In Baker’s (2014) study, several teachers expressed their willingness to introduce NNETs’ models into their pronunciation classes but claimed a lack of guidance and teaching materials that afford the practice. Given the high authority of textbooks for NNETs (Forman, 2016), the inclusion of a diversity of NNET models in textbooks would be influential in making EFL pronunciation pedagogy revisited and boost the repositioning of NNETs of pronunciation.

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## Author

*Thi Thanh Huyen Phuong* is a lecturer in the Department of English of FPT University in Hanoi, Vietnam. Huyen has involved in EFL teaching at different universities in Vietnam for the past 15 years. In 2018, Huyen gained her PhD degree in Applied Linguistics/TESOL at the university of Technology Sydney, Australia.

Department of English  
FPT University  
Hoa Lac High Tech Park, Hanoi, Vietnam  
Tel: +84 24 7300 5588  
Mobile: + 84 983286616  
Email: huyenpt3@fe.edu.vn

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