Common Mistakes in Pronunciation among Students in The English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University

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Abstract: When learning English as a second language in a nation with a wide variety of races and cultures, the influence of the native tongue is nearly inevitable. Both the performance and communicative competence of learners can be negatively impacted by this influence. This paper is written for students in the English for Specific Purposes Department (ESPD), Hanoi University, who want to improve their learning of English Pronunciation. This mixed-methods study combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It focuses on some common pronunciation errors that EPSD students made when speaking English by analysing 120 recordings for the students' mid-term test from their second semester in the academic year 2023-2024. Some common pronunciation errors are found, including consonant endings and vowel sounds. The study also shares some strategies for learners to improve their English pronunciation. It will be a helpful reference source for not only lecturers and learners at ESPD, Hanoi University, but other educational institutions across Vietnam.

Keywords: English Pronunciation; Pronunciation Errors; English.

1. Introduction

English has emerged as a global language and is now a second official language in numerous countries (Crystal 2003). It plays a vital role in numerous areas of life, including science, technology, aviation, the Internet, commerce, and tourism (Hoang Van Van 2010). Consequently, the demand for English education has surged in non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam. However, Vietnamese learners often encounter significant challenges in mastering English pronunciation due to phonemes that do not exist in Vietnamese and differences in the treatment of ending sounds. These factors can lead to misunderstandings and unintelligible speech. Addressing these pronunciation difficulties is crucial for enhancing communication skills.

One of the essential aspects of language proficiency is that learners achieve clear and understandable pronunciation. Fraser (2000) suggests that English as Second Language (ESL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) educators should be provided with specialized courses and resources to enhance their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation. She emphasizes the need for high-quality, effective instructional materials, especially computer-based resources with audio examples, which can be utilized both for independent learning

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and in classroom settings when teachers need additional support. Fraser (2000) also contends that research in second language education should prioritize exploring effective methods for teaching pronunciation rather than debating its importance. Consequently, both educators and students need to adopt new roles and adapt their teaching and learning strategies to meet these evolving goals. In this context, teachers should take on the role of pronunciation coaches, while students should engage actively in their learning process.

This study identifies common pronunciation errors among students in the English for Specific Purposes Department (ESPD) at Hanoi University. By analysing these errors, the study aims to provide insights into ESPD students' specific challenges and propose strategies to improve their pronunciation and overall communication skills, which will surface shared implications for other language learners in different educational institutions

Over more than seventeen years of teaching in the ESPD at Hanoi University, it has become evident that students, especially those from regions outside of Hanoi, encounter persistent pronunciation difficulties that hinder effective communication. Despite the critical role of pronunciation in language learning, more research needs to be done, focusing specifically on pronunciation challenges English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students face. To address this gap, this study aimed to identify the pronunciation problems these students faced and explore potential strategies to enhance their pronunciation and overall communication skills. More specifically, the study intended to:

- identify the difficulties in English pronunciation among ESP students; and

- suggest ways to help ESP students improve English pronunciation.

In this instance, the study only focused on first-year students majoring in computer science and tourism administration enrolled in the ESPD at Hanoi University. Therefore, the findings are representative of non-English major students and do not necessarily reflect the spoken language experiences of students in other majors at Hanoi University.

In particular, this study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are common pronunciation errors among ESP students?
2. What are some suggestions to improve ESP students' pronunciation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronunciation

According to Seidlhofer (2001), pronunciation enhances speaking abilities, which supports activities such as passing oral assessments administered by educators in educational institutions. To enable a smooth transition into the professional world, university graduates must speak clearly during job interviews, proposal presentations, negotiations, and other professional interactions. Another important subskill within the domain of speaking is pronunciation. If an individual speaks without thinking about pronunciation, the listener and the speaker may understand the same thing differently.

Because mispronunciations can impair a speaker's ability to communicate clearly, pronunciation is crucial. According to Morley (as cited in Keshavarz and Abu Bakar 2017), pronunciation clarity is a part of communication ability. Therefore,

language learners should constantly strive to pronounce the target language more accurately. As a result, a language instructor must recognise the difficulties with pronunciation that speakers of foreign languages face.

Since the onset of the communicative approach in language teaching, particularly in the teaching and learning English, language lecturers and tutors have generally placed minimal emphasis on the importance of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996).

According to Davenport and Hannahs (2013), humans have a variety of ways of producing sounds, not all of which are relevant to language (for example, coughing, burping, etc.). Sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a particular language. For example, reference can be given to the distinctive sounds of English, French, Vietnamese and other languages. In this sense, pronunciation is recognised as the production and reception of sounds of speech. Additionally, sound is crucial because it is used to achieve meaning in the contexts it is used in. In this sense, the code combines with other factors to make communication possible. In this sense, pronunciation concerns act of speaking. Learning a language means learning a new way of using the speech organs and a new way of controlling the speech organs in order to produce sounds peculiar to the new language. This process can be more difficult as some of the speech organs are not visible, and their movements are far back in the pharyngeal cavity thus challenging to control.

2.2. Importance of Pronunciation in Language Learning

Pronunciation is essential in communication because pronunciation errors can affect the clarity of a person's delivery. Morley (as cited in Keshavarz and Abu Bakar 2017) states that pronunciation clarity is a component of communication competence. Therefore, a language teacher must recognize the pronunciation problems that foreign language learners have if they are going to effectively support them to improve the pronunciation of their target language.

According to Harmer (2001), while language teachers must pay more attention to teaching good pronunciation to their students, many cite time constraints in holding them back in achieving this outcome. As a result, they argue that being able to communicate and be understood is sufficient in language learning. However, Harmer (2001) stresses that the ultimate goal of language learning is to equip students with the skills and ability to communicate effectively in the target language. This form of communication involves understanding and being understood and is a powerful tool that can inspire and motivate language learners.

2.3. Teaching Pronunciation

Teaching pronunciation has evolved significantly over the recent decades. Traditional methods focused heavily on mimicry and repetition, emphasizing the mechanical practice of sounds (Jones 1950). However, recent approaches advocate for a more communicative and integrative method, including awareness-raising activities, listening discrimination tasks, and contextualized practice opportunities (Gilbert 2008).

Morley (1991) emphasizes the importance of integrating pronunciation into the broader communicative framework of language teaching, suggesting that pronunciation should not be isolated from other aspects of language use. Celce-

Murcia et al. (1996) also propose a learner-centred approach that considers the learner's specific needs, incorporating segmental and suprasegmental features and combining explicit instruction with meaningful communication.

Recent technological advancements have further enriched pronunciation teaching. Tools such as speech recognition software, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs, and mobile phone apps provide learners with immediate feedback and opportunities for autonomous practice (Neri et al. 2002). These technologies enable personalized learning experiences and can effectively supplement traditional classroom instruction.

2.4. Types of Pronunciation Mistakes

Pronunciation difficulties are a significant aspect of language learning, including English, which affects the intelligibility and fluency of non-native English speakers. Researchers (e.g., CITE) have identified and analysed common pronunciation errors, focusing on specific sounds that challenge learners from different linguistic backgrounds. The remainder of this literature review examines common types of pronunciation mistakes, including problems with ending consonants, consonant clusters, the /ʒ/ sound, the dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/, vowels, and diphthongs like /əʊ/ and /eɪ/.

2.4.1 Problems with Ending Consonants

Research indicates that ending consonants pose a substantial challenge for many English language learners, especially those whose first languages do not emphasize consonant sounds in final positions (cite). According to Swan and Smith (2001), speakers of languages like Vietnamese and Chinese often omit final consonants due to their absence in their native phonological systems. Additionally, Avery and Ehrlich (1992) note that Vietnamese speakers often struggle with producing final voiced stops such as /b/, /d/, and /g/ as well as fricatives like /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /z/ in the coda position.

2.4.2 Problems with consonant clusters

According to Avery (1991), "Vietnamese has no consonant clusters in initial or final position" (p. 155). Therefore, many English consonants do not appear in Vietnamese, which can lead learners to make mistakes when they speak English. Avery (1991) also identified that "Vietnamese students tend to omit one or more consonants from a difficult cluster" (p. 155). The most common mistake is the deletion of consonant **s** in the middle of words; for example, they say /æbtræk/ for abstract (Honey 1987).

Some final consonant clusters such as /kt/ as in *walked*, /ʃt/ as in *washed*, /ʃd/ as in *judged*, and /ld/ as in *filled* are difficult for Vietnamese learners to pronounce (Nguyen Thi Thu Thao 2007). Also, two-consonant clusters that contain /l/ in /lz/, /lt/, /ld/, or /lf/ are observed to be difficult for all speakers since the sound itself never appears in the first language. For instance, the words *world* may be pronounced as /wɜːd/, and *myself* may be pronounced as /maise/. These mistakes can be complicated for Vietnamese learners to overcome.

2.4.2 Problem with /ʒ/

Another area of difficulty for English language learners involves consonant clusters, which are sequences of two or more consonants that appear without intervening vowels. Consonant clusters can be challenging, especially for speakers of languages that do not allow such combinations, such as Vietnamese. Research by Yavaş (2011) suggests that

consonant clusters, which are particularly frequent in English, often cause pronunciation errors, with learners either simplifying clusters by omitting consonants or inserting vowel sounds between them. This phenomenon is known as "epenthesis," and it is a strategy learners use to conform to the phonotactic rules of their first language (L1).

The difficulties in acquiring both the /ʒ/ sound and consonant clusters highlight broader challenges in second language phonological development. According to Flege's (1995) Speech Learning Model, these challenges arise due to the differences between the learner's L1 and the target language's phonetic inventory. Learners struggle to produce sounds not found in their native language, often approximating them with familiar phonemes from their L1. For example, Vietnamese learners, whose language lacks the /ʒ/ sound and complex consonant clusters, tend to modify these unfamiliar sounds to more closely resemble native phonetic patterns. As learners gain more exposure and practice, however, many are able to refine their pronunciation and reduce these errors.

2.4.3 Problems with /ð/ and /θ/

The soft palate is raised when the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds are produced, and the nasal resonator is closed off. The tip and rims of the tongue make light contact with the edges and inner surfaces of the upper incisors, while firmer contact is made with the upper side teeth. This configuration allows air to escape between the front of the tongue and the incisors, creating friction. In the case of /θ/, this friction is voiceless, whereas /ð/ may involve some vocal cord vibration. However, Vietnamese speakers frequently substitute these voiceless fricatives with a heavily voiceless stop /t/ or an aspirated sound similar to the Vietnamese /th/, as seen in words like *thank*. This substitution occurs because, in Vietnamese, the corresponding letter often pairs with a strongly aspirated /t/ sound. Consequently, the English word *three* might be pronounced similarly to *tree*. Furthermore, Vietnamese learners of English commonly replace the /ð/ sound with /d/ or /z/, resulting in pronunciations like /dæn/ or /zæn/ for words such as *then* (Avery 1991). This tendency to replace /θ/ with a sound resembling the Vietnamese /th/ and /ð/ with sounds akin to the Vietnamese /d/ or /gi/ is prevalent among learners of English, many of whom struggle to produce the /θ/ sound correctly.

2.4.4 Problems with vowels

As Honey (1987) stated, "The highly complex Vietnamese vowel system possesses eleven pure vowels and many more diphthongs and tripthongs" (p.239). As a native Vietnamese speaker, I understand that those pure vowels are as follows: /a/, /ă/, /â/, /o/, /ô/, /ơ/, /e/, /ê/, /u/, /ư/, and /i/. Generally, most Vietnamese vowels are free of positions, meaning they can stand alone. Some, however, cannot. People can usually recognise Vietnamese diphthongs and tripthongs through spelling (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1996). Vowel sounds also pose significant challenges as English has many vowel phonemes compared to many other languages. Gilakjani (2012) notes that learners often struggle with the lax tense vowel distinction, leading to confusion between pairs like /iː/ and /ɪ/, as in *sheep* and *ship*. Languages with fewer vowel contrasts, such as Arabic and Japanese, tend to cause learners to merge vowel sounds, leading to misunderstandings.

2.4.5 Problems with diphthongs

Diphthongs are very complex sounds as they require combining two vowel sounds.

It has been found that many students cannot correctly make the sounds /əʊ/ and /eɪ/. Students mispronounce most words containing the /əʊ/ sound (Abker 2020). Vietnamese students tend to say that sound like Vietnamese /ô/. For example, they pronounce *hello* as /he lô/, *boat* as /bốt/, *road* as /rốt/, *coat* as /cốt/, *code* as /côd/, and *wrote* as /rôt/. Also, most words containing the /eɪ/ sound are pronounced like the /ê/ of Vietnamese. For example, *fade* as /fêd/ and *name* as /nêm/. Several studies have focused on pronunciation challenges faced by Vietnamese learners of English, particularly with the diphthongs /əʊ/ and /eɪ/. Research by Nguyen Thi Thu Hang (2014) highlights that Vietnamese students often have difficulty with these diphthongs due to the absence of similar sounds in Vietnamese. This often leads to mispronunciations where learners substitute these diphthongs with simpler monophthongs or incorrect sounds closer to their native language phonology.

3. Methodology

3.1 Background to the study

The study was conducted within the English for Specific Purposes Department (ESPD) at the Hanoi University. The Department was established in September 2005 to teach English to first-year students of specialized faculties, such as: Business Administration and Tourism, Banking and Finance, Accounting, International Studies, Information Technology, Development Research, and Multimedia Communication. The Department offers three courses: (i) Basic English, (ii) Academic English, and (iii) English for Specific Purposes.

The Department creates the best conditions possible for the teaching and learning English language. Each class has approximately 25 to 30 students. The classrooms are generally equipped with a projector, air-conditioner, whiteboard, and desktop computer.

3.2 The participants

The study was carried out with 120 students enrolled in the ESPD course. The participants were first-year students, who were non-English majors. Specifically, they were students majoring in Computer Science and Tourism Administration. They were all 18 years old. Nearly 60% were male identifying students and around 40% were females. The data for this study were collected through the mid-term oral test in the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year.

3.3 Research instruments

This study employed a mixed-methods approach by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to create a comprehensive and robust overview of pronunciation issues within the target population. Data was collected through a mid-term speaking test during the second semester, constituting 30% of the overall speaking score for the course. In the sixth week of instruction, each student was assigned a topic and required to deliver a two-minute oral presentation. These presentations were recorded and then uploaded on Google Drive for subsequent assessment by the lecturer.

4. Findings

4.1. Problems with ending sounds

4.1.1. Ending consonants

As Table 1 below shows, some ending consonant errors among ESPD students reveal significant pronunciation challenges.

Table 1: *Issues with ending consonants and error frequency*

Difficult ending consonants	Examples	Number of errors made by participants
/z/	chairs, rose, organize, rise	30
/f/	laugh, life,	25
/s/	house, nice, practice, introduce	35
/t/	hate, seat, mat, start	40
/v/	have, five, love, live	45
/ks/	six, fakes, hacks, bakes	60
/ʤ/	orange, fridge, sausage	30
/ʃ/	brush, crush, bush, push	35
/tʃ/	watch, Dutch, church,	40

The consonant cluster /ks/ (e.g., *six, hacks*) was the most problematic with 60 students making errors, which is most likely due to the absence of such clusters in Vietnamese. High error rates were also found with voiced fricative /v/ (45 students) and voiceless fricative /f/ (25 students) suggesting difficulties with voiced sounds requiring vocal cord vibration. Errors with the voiceless fricative /s/ and voiced fricative /ʒ/ were noted among 35 students further indicating challenges with fricatives in the final positions. Affricates /ʤ/ and /tʃ/ also posed problems with 30 and 40 students struggling, respectively, highlighting the complexity of these sounds. Even the common voiceless stop /t/ caused issues for 40 students, possibly due to the unreleased nature of final plosives in Vietnamese language. Targeted instruction may help address these pronunciation difficulties with ending consonants.

4.1.2 Ending consonant clusters

Table 2 below highlights the pronunciation challenges Vietnamese learners face when dealing with specific English consonant clusters.

Table 2: *Issues with consonant clusters and error frequency*

Difficult consonant clusters	Examples	Number of errors made by participants
/kt/	walked, stalked	70
/ʃt/	washed, rushed	75
/ld/	filled, pilled	87
/lf/	himself, elf	40

The /ɪd/ cluster (e.g., *filled*, *pilled*) had the highest number of errors with 87 subjects struggling, indicating difficulty with articulating voiced consonants in quick succession. This may be due to the absence of such clusters in Vietnamese. The /ft/ cluster (e.g., *washed*, *rushed*) was the second most problematic, affecting 75 students, suggesting issues with maintaining continuous airflow for /f/ before swapping for /t/. The /kt/ cluster (e.g., *walked*, stalked) caused errors for 70

students, likely due to the tendency to simplify speech by omitting final consonants. Conversely, the /lf/ cluster (e.g., *himself*, *elf*) had fewer errors, with only 40 subjects affected, possibly due to the familiarity with the /f/ sound in Vietnamese.

4.3. Problems with /ʒ/

Table 3 reveals pronunciation challenges with the /ʒ/ sound among ESPD students, showcasing that certain words containing this sound present significant difficulty.

Table 3: *Issues with /ʒ/ and error frequency*

	Examples	Number of errors made by participants
Difficult /ʒ/	vision	33
	pleasure	40
	equation	35
	conclusion	33
	confusion	31
	visual	30
	exposure	35

The word *pleasure* had the highest number of errors, with 40 students struggling, indicating that this context may present unique challenges. Words like *equation* and *exposure* also had notable errors, affecting 35 students each, suggesting that the /ʒ/ sound in different linguistic contexts still poses a substantial challenge. *Vision* and *conclusion* had similar error rates, each with 33 errors, while *confusion* and *visual* had slightly fewer errors, with 31 and 30, respectively. These findings suggest that the /ʒ/ sound, regardless of its position within different words, consistently presents pronunciation challenges for learners, indicating a need for focused instructional strategies to address these difficulties.

4.4. Problems with /θ/ and /ð/

As documented below, Table 4 describes the pronunciation challenges faced by the ESPD students with the English dental fricatives /θ/ (voiceless) and /ð/ (voiced).

Table 4: *Issues with /θ/ and /ð/ and error frequency*

Difficult consonant /θ/ and /ð/	Examples	Number of errors made by participants
/θ/	three, thousand, throw, thank you, thick, thumb, think, anything, everything	40
/ð/	brother, father, weather, whether, the, this, these, that, those	45

The findings show that 40 students struggled with the voiceless /θ/, often substituting it with /t/ or /s/, leading to mispronunciations such as *thank* becoming *tank* and *three* as *tree*. Meanwhile, 45 students had difficulty with the voiced /ð/, frequently replacing it with /d/ or /z/, resulting in *this* being pronounced as *dis* or

zis. The higher error rate for /ð/ suggests that its voiced nature and the lack of an equivalent sound in Vietnamese make it more challenging, affecting students' spoken fluency and clarity.

4.5. Problems with vowels

4.5.1 Problems with /iː/ versus /ɪ/

While pronouncing, the students rarely focused on the differences between the /iː/ versus /ɪ/sounds. When learning in class, the students expressed the difference in the two sounds being due to the **/iː/** sound being longer than the/ɪ/ sound. However, when speaking, they pronounced both sounds in almost the same way. Table 5, below, highlights the challenges Vietnamese learners face in distinguishing between the English vowel sounds /iː/ (long, close front unrounded) and /ɪ/ (short, near-close near-front unrounded).

Table 5: *Issues with /iː/ versus /ɪ/ and error frequency*

/ɪ/	/iː/	Number of errors made by participants
sit	seat	46
live	leave	38
rid	read	25
it	eat	37
hit	heat	42
pill	peel	33

These distinctions are crucial in English but often problematic for non-native speakers whose languages, such as Vietnamese, do not emphasize vowel length. The pair *sit* (/ɪ/) and *seat* (**/iː/**) showed the highest error rate, with 46 subjects struggling, indicating a significant challenge in perceiving or producing the length difference. Similarly, the pairs *hit* (/ɪ/) and *heat* (**/iː/**) and *it* (/ɪ/) and *eat* (**/iː/**) had 42 and 37 errors, respectively. These findings suggest that the inability to differentiate these vowel lengths can lead to frequent mispronunciations and misunderstandings in English communication.

4.5.2 Problem with /uː/ versus /ʊ/

Similarly, Table 6 examines common pronunciation errors among Vietnamese learners in differentiating the English vowel sounds /uː/ (long, close back rounded) and /ʊ/ (short, near-close near-back rounded), which are not distinct in their native language.

Table 6: *Issues with /u:/ versus /ʊ/ and error frequency*

/u:/	/ʊ/	Number of errors made by participants
fool	full	37
food	foot	34
pool	pull	41
Luke	look	45

The most significant issues were found with the pairs *Luke* (/u:/) and *look* (/ʊ/), and *pool* (/u:/) and *pull* (/ʊ/), with 45 and 41 students struggling, respectively. Other pairs like *fool* (/u:/) and *full* (/ʊ/) and *food* (/u:/) and *foot* (/ʊ/) also showed moderate errors, which affected 37 and 34 participants. These findings suggest that Vietnamese learners have difficulty perceiving and producing these vowel distinctions, leading to frequent mispronunciations that can hinder clear communication in English. Enhanced pronunciation training focusing on these contrasts is necessary to improve learners' accuracy.

4.5.3 Problems with /e/ versus /æ/

As captured below, Table 7reveals that Vietnamese learners faced significant challenges in distinguishing between the English vowel sounds /e/ (short, mid-front unrounded) and /æ/ (short, near-open front unrounded).

Table 7: *Issues with /e/ and /æ/ and error frequency*

/æ/	/e/	Number of errors made by participants
bag	beg	32
bat	bet	33
man	men	35
mantle	mental	31

The pair *man* (/æ/) and *men* (/e/) had the highest number of errors, with 35 participants struggling to differentiate between them, indicating difficulty with the subtle differences in the tongue position and jaw openness required for these sounds. Similarly, the pairs *bat* (/æ/) and bet (/e/) and *bag* (/æ/) and *beg* (/e/) showed significant errors, affecting 33 and 32 students, respectively. Even the pair mantle (/æ/) and *mental* (/e/) showed moderate errors (31 participants), highlighting ongoing challenges that can lead to mispronunciations and misunderstandings in English communication.

4.6. Problems with diphthongs /əʊ/ and /eɪ/

Finally, Table 8 highlights the pronunciation challenges Vietnamese learners face in distinguishing between the English diphthongs /əʊ/ (as in *bone*) and /eɪ/ (as in *date*).

Table 8: *Issues with /əʊ/ and /eɪ/ and error frequency*

/əʊ/	/eɪ/	Number of errors made by participants
bone	date	50
unload	lane	55
telephone	same	63
homework	claim	70

These diphthongs, common in English, are tricky for non-native speakers due to differences in vowel combinations and diphthong usage in Vietnamese. The pair *homework* (/əʊ/) and *claim* (/eɪ/) showed the highest number of errors, with 70 participants struggling, indicating difficulty in perceiving or producing these sounds. Similarly, *telephone* (/əʊ/) and *same* (/eɪ/) saw 63 errors, underscoring the challenge with glide and length differences. Other pairs like *unload* (/əʊ/) and *lane* (/eɪ/) and *bone* (/əʊ/) and *date* (/eɪ/) also had substantial errors, affecting 55 and 50 students, respectively, highlighting ongoing issues in pronunciation that could also lead to communication misunderstandings.

5. Discussion

The analysis of pronunciation errors among students in the English for Specific Purposes Department (ESPD) at Hanoi University highlights several critical areas of difficulty that align with findings from existing literature on the English language learning challenges faced by Vietnamese speakers. The following discussion integrates insights from the study with broader research to underscore the specific pronunciation issues and potential strategies for improvement.

5.1 Problems with Ending Consonants

The study revealed significant challenges with ending consonants,

particularly with sounds such as /ks/, /v/, /t/, and /dʒ/. These findings are consistent with the research of Swan and Smith (2001), which indicated the pronunciation issues faced by learners whose native languages, such as Vietnamese, do not emphasise final consonants omit or substitute these sounds. The high error rates in words ending with /ks/ and /v/ suggest that Vietnamese learners may not be accustomed to the voicing or combination of such sounds required for accurate pronunciation. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) also noted similar issues, highlighting the need for focused practice on these sounds to improve clarity in English speech.

5.2 Problems with Consonant Clusters

The difficulty experienced by the ESPD students with consonant clusters, as demonstrated by the frequent errors with clusters such as /kt/ and /ld/, mirrors the findings of Avery (1991), who noted that Vietnamese learners often omit one or more consonants from clusters due to their absence in their native language. This tendency can significantly alter meaning and intelligibility. For example, pronouncing *walked* as /wak/ or *filled* as /fɪd/ reduces comprehensibility significantly. Effective pronunciation instruction should include exercises explicitly targeting the articulation of these clusters', to help learners to develop the

muscular control and auditory discrimination required for accurate sound production.

5.3 Problems with /ʒ/ and Dental Fricatives /ð/ and /θ/

The /ʒ/ sound and dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ posed substantial challenges with errors, such as substituting /ʒ/ with /z/ or /d/. This issue is common among learners from language backgrounds without these sounds, as discussed by Jenkins (2000). Vietnamese speakers may replace /θ/ with /t/ or /s/, leading to mispronunciations like *thank* as *tank*. Avery (1991) and Nguyen Thi Thu Thao (2007) both highlighted that these substitutions can stem from the absence of similar sounds in Vietnamese, which lacks the friction produced by English dental fricatives. Teaching strategies should focus on raising awareness of these phonetic distinctions and providing repetitive, context-based practice to reinforce correct articulation.

5.4 Problems with Vowels

The confusion between vowel pairs such as **/i:/** and /ɪ/, /u:/ and /ʊ/, and /e/ and /æ/ underscores the challenge of English vowel distinctions for Vietnamese learners. As noted by Gilakjani (2012), the complexity of the English vowel system, which includes distinctions based on length and tongue position, contrasts sharply with the Vietnamese vowel system. This discrepancy leads to frequent errors in minimal pairs like *sit* and *seat* and *pool* and *pull*. The study's findings suggest a need for explicit instruction and practice in these vowel contrasts, using minimal pair drills and auditory discrimination exercises to enhance learners' ability to perceive and produce these differences.

5.5 Problems with Diphthongs /əʊ/ and /eɪ/

Errors with diphthongs /əʊ/ and /eɪ/ are particularly prevalent, as students tend to replace these sounds with the simpler monophthongs found in Vietnamese. Nguyen Thi Thu Hang (2014) observed that these diphthongs require the tongue to glide between two vowel positions, a movement, which is uncommon in Vietnamese phonetics. Mispronunciations such as /gɔ/ for *go* and /se/ for *say* reflect this difficulty. To address these issues, pronunciation teaching should incorporate exercises that emphasize the glide and length characteristic of diphthongs, possibly using visual aids or kinaesthetic activities to help students internalize the correct mouth movements.

6. Recommendations

The results of our study, although small in size, were impressive in terms of the coverage of mispronounced sounds and the seriousness of errors on English compressibility and fluency. Given these pronunciation problems, the following recommendations are made.

Regarding the responsibility of teachers, it is necessary that they pay more attention to students' pronunciation and provide feedback to correct their mistakes as possible. Improving students' pronunciation must be the responsibility of all teachers, not only teachers who teach pronunciation. As far as the teaching of pronunciation is concerned, a variety of techniques that have been applied in language classes. Five considerations when teaching pronunciation to English language learners are reviewed below by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996):

1. **Listen and imitate:** This technique sounds how a child learns his/her mother tongue. When the child hears a particular word in a given setting, he/she

will listen to it and tend to imitate. Using tape recorders, language labs, and video recorders can enhance this technique.

2. **Phonetic training:** The teacher uses articulatory descriptions, articulatory diagrams, and the phonetic alphabet to provide their students with oral drills.

3. **Minimal pair drills:** This technique helps students distinguish similar and problematic sounds in the target language through listening discrimination and spoken practice.

4. **Contextualised minimal pairs:** A **Contextualized Minimal Pairs** activity focuses on helping learners recognize and produce subtle differences in pronunciation by using pairs of words that differ by only one sound (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/, or /i:/ vs. /ɪ/). The activity places these minimal pairs in meaningful contexts (sentences or short dialogues) so learners can better understand how small changes in sounds can affect meaning in real-life situations.

5. **Visual aids:** A teacher may employ various visual aids, such as drawings, articulation diagrams, phonetic symbol charts from the Inernational Phonetic Alphabet, IPA, mouth movement videos, colour-coding and highlighting sounds, interactive pronunciation apps, flash cards and word maps or gesture-based learning. These aids enhance comprehension, promote self-correction, and make learning pronunciation more engaging and effective.

Kelly (2000) asserts that teaching pronunciation entails teaching both productive and receptive skills, which is more in line with the current trend of teaching English pronunciation. Kelly (2000) offers the following three strategies, in addition, to support English language learning.

1. **Tongue twisters:** The teacher gives the class a series of lines with similar sounds that are hard for the students to pronounce. By using this technique, students can practice making sounds that are different from one another and even sounds that are not in their original tongue.

2. **Spelling and pronunciation exercises:** Students must determine which sound corresponds to which spelling symbol. After that, they should accurately generate the sound.

3. **Using minimal pairs:** Teachers help students concentrate on the sounds that present the most significant challenge. After that, students must recognize and pronounce word pairs identical to one another save for a single sound segment that appears once throughout the string.

For students, first, it is advisable that they learn and remember the phonemic alphabet. Rather than depending on spelling, it is used to transcribe the exact sounds in English words. Students who know the phonetic alphabet and whose teachers use it are provided with additional input when learning the correct pronunciation of words. In this case, they not only hear the correct pronunciation, but they see it, too. Phonetic transcriptions show students, even those struggling to hear the correct pronunciation, exactly how an English word is supposed to sound. Another helpful tip for the students to improve their pronunciation is to look at the teacher's or a native speaker's mouth to see how wide the mouth is, where to put their tongue and, at the same time, practice after hearing them. Then they can look at the mirror or use the reverse camera on

their smartphones to see if they have put their tongue in the right place, whether their mouth is rounded or unrounded, and if they are moving their muscles in the same manner as well as hear if they are producing the same sound as the teacher. Last, but not least, practice makes perfect. Students need to be exposed to and listen to English recordings and songs as well as watch movies on YouTube or different websites. At the same time, they should practice speaking by saying words, then sentences using Google Translate or Google Voice. Those applications can check pronunciation of a word or sentence in their chosen language. Also, students can record their voices, send to them their friends whose pronunciation is better and ask them to provide feedback. To get even more feedback, they could send the recordings to their lecturers or other native speaking teachers. Some websites to practice listening and pronunciation are suggested in Appendix 1.

7. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the significant challenges faced by students at the English for Specific Purposes Department (ESPD) at Hanoi University in mastering English pronunciation. The complexities of English phonetics, particularly in areas like consonant endings, consonant clusters, vowels, and diphthongs, present substantial obstacles for Vietnamese learners. These difficulties are rooted in the fundamental differences between the English and Vietnamese sound systems, leading to common errors such as the omission of final consonants, incorrect articulation of fricatives, and confusion between similar vowel sounds.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of targeted pronunciation

training that addresses these specific challenges. To improve their English pronunciation, ESPD students need more than just exposure to the language. They require focused, systematic instruction that incorporates phonetic practice, minimal pair drills, and modern tools such as phonetic transcriptions and technology-assisted learning platforms.

Furthermore, language educators must integrate pronunciation practice into their regular teaching routines, ensuring that students receive consistent feedback and opportunities to correct their mistakes. Teachers' roles extend beyond the classroom in becoming facilitators of continuous pronunciation improvement by providing students with practical strategies and resources that they can use independently.

This study also emphasizes the need for ongoing research in this area. By gaining a deeper understanding of the specific pronunciation difficulties ESPD students faced, educators can develop more effective instructional methods and materials tailored to the needs of their Vietnamese learners. Future studies should explore the impact of various teaching interventions on pronunciation accuracy and investigate the long-term benefits of integrating pronunciation practice into the curriculum.

In conclusion, addressing ESPD students' pronunciation challenges is crucial for their overall communicative competence in English. By equipping students with the tools and techniques needed to overcome these obstacles, educators can help them achieve greater clarity and confidence in their spoken English, ultimately enhancing their academic and professional prospects.

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APPENDIX 1

Websites to support the development of listening and pronunciation skills

1. BBC Learning English YouTube playlist (all in one): https://m.youtube.com/user/bbclearningenglish/playlists

2. TED Talks: https://www.ted.com/talks

3. CNN YouTube playlist: https://www.youtube.com/user/CNN/playlists

4. Famous people ESLfast: https://www.eslfast.com/people/index.htm

5. VOA News: https://learningenglish.voanews.com/

6. Listening and doing exercise online: http://www.elllo.org/

7. Listening and gap-filling exercises: https://listenaminute.com/

8. Breaking news - different skills: https://breakingnewsenglish.com/

9. Spotlight: https://spotlightenglish.com/

10. Kids' stories: https://fawesome.tv/

11. Pronunciation and quizzes: http://sozoexchange.com/

12. http://podcastsenglish.com (which is for different levels)

13. https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/elementary-podcasts (for elementary levels)

14. http://effortlessenglish.libsyn.com

15. http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?cat=podcasts

16. http://eltpodcast.com (conversations for basic and intermediate levels)

17. http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/tae

18. http://learningenglish.voanews.com/podcast/0.html

19. http://culips.com (useful for learning vocabulary and idioms through easy podcasts)